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STUDIES

IN

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

BY

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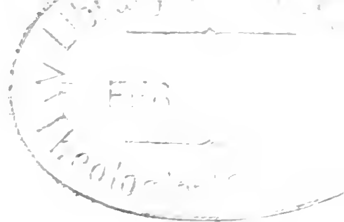
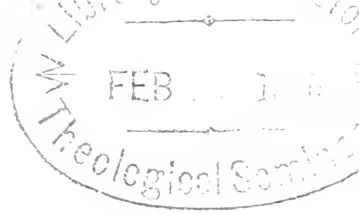


PREFACE.

THE present volume is intended as a contribution to the history of the development of Christianity, or, assuming its supernatural origin, it endeavours to trace wherein it was modified by the different influences with which from time to time it came in contact. If Christianity was not to remain a mere theory, but was to become a living and acting influence among mankind, to such modifications it must inevitably submit. Other religions have perished through adhering rigidly to some exclusive formula or idea, in process of time outgrown. Christianity has triumphed by incorporating whatever truth and goodness were to be found in preceding systems. Some find the pure age of Christianity only in its infancy, others foresee its greatest triumph in ages yet to come; and in both views there may be truth. Its highest development will assuredly only manifest the power and promise which have been in it from the beginning. For the full unfolding of such a glorious work of Providence many ages are required, and we may be certain that each new phase through which Christianity passes will not

exhaust, but will cast some new light and meaning on it. There is much truth in Dr Newman's comparison of Christianity to a river, which by degrees gets rid of its impurities and becomes clearer and fuller as it rolls on. The present volume considers the Christian religion as manifesting itself successively in dogma, in asceticism, as a civilising influence aiding in reconstructing a new society upon the ruins of the Roman Empire, and finally in its collision with Mohammedanism.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CONTENTS.

CHAP. PAGE
I. THE PAGAN EMPIRE, ... 1
II. DOGMA, ... 25
III. PERSECUTION, ... 42
IV. DEVELOPMENT OF DOGMA, ... 55
V. ASCETICISM, ... 73
VI. THE CONVERTED EMPIRE, ... 97
VII. MOHAMMEDANISM, ... 119

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PAGAN EMPIRE.

In order to understand the working of the new influence Christianity, when it was first introduced into society, we must take into account the elements with which it had to deal, the composition of the society which it was to permeate. It is evident that the effects which any new force acting upon an organism will exert depend very much upon the condition of that organism. If it be a healthy one, it will be able to assimilate the new influence to itself, nay, may receive from it additional vitality and strength. If, however, it be decaying beyond possibility of recovery, this new influence will only hasten its decline. An old and wasted frame cannot be reconstructed; an old life cannot be abruptly transported into surroundings altogether different without giving way under the shock. If the old Roman society and government was founded on certain ideas, an understood hierarchy of virtues supposed to be essential to its wellbeing, this order could

not be supplanted and a new order introduced without a violent shock to the whole existing order of things.

One who would give an exact picture of the civilised world of Augustus's time, of its cities, its manners, its amusements—who could make it live again in the pages of history and render its modern equivalent—would at the same time afford an explanation of its decay. The first impression left on us by such a sketch would no doubt be one of vast outward prosperity. Never had life seemed more brilliant and more gay than in the first century of our era. Never had the elements of dispeace and confusion seemed more utterly banished. Never had a civil Government reached more that centralisation of power which seemed to guarantee its perpetuity. The Roman peace brooded over all the quarters of the civilised world. The vast Roman State, stretching out its arms in all directions, was only the visible representation of the power of one man, who had absorbed all lesser powers and magistracies in his own person—who, through his ministers and agents, was present in every part of its remote dominions, conscious of the minutest actions, and of the slightest throb of life, powerful ever to reward or punish. The only real unity indeed existing in that immense dominion was expressed by the Autocrat's absolute will, and by the supreme power of the conquering people. All the subject-races retained, no doubt, to some extent, their own individuality, more so in the East than in the West. The picture of the empire at this period is a varied and majestic one.

On the very outskirts of the Roman power one might come on rich and populous cities. Seleucia, on the Tigris, rebuilt and enlarged, occupied, after the capital, the most important position in point of population; Antioch came next. It had lately been laid out by

Antiochus Nicator in magnificent style; its streets arranged in rectangular form after the manner of Grecian architecture, were splendid and imposing. It comprised within its walls four towns; its suburb Daphne was noted centuries afterwards for its splendour and luxury. Situated on a beautiful and spacious plain, about fifteen miles from the sea, and sheltered by lofty mountains on the rear from severe storms, it enjoyed a continued temperate breeze; it was a great commercial city, and a centre of exchange for the surrounding districts. It enjoyed in addition the distinction of being the seat of the proconsular government of Syria; and often the Roman legionaries, amidst its luxurious retreats, became forgetful of the duties of their calling, and relapsed from the sternness of their discipline. Alexandria, a great emporium of trade, standing on the boundaries of two continents, was fitted to distribute the productions of both, and was inhabited by an unruly crowd of Copts and Jews, living in fierce hostility to one another, united only in dislike to the dominant Greek. Corinth, restored to somewhat of its former glories by the munificence of Julius Cæsar, was also important commercially; seated on its narrow isthmus, it united the trade of the East and West which shrank from a voyage round the stormy Cape of Malea. Athens lived again in more than a mere reminiscence of former splendours; temple after temple had been rebuilt or restored by the generosity of successive kings; its walls were filled with statues, its streets lined with public buildings; and if the unevenness of the ground on which it stood prevented any approach to general splendour of architecture; if the mass of its inhabitants dwelt in squalid cabins approached by tortuous and narrow lanes, in point of climate, of situation, of

attractiveness, it was unsurpassed in the whole world. Its university still brought together students from all quarters of the world, especially from Rome. To have studied within its walls was one of the requisites of a polite education; and if its lecture-rooms resounded with the echoes of old controversies rather than with any striking and original views; if no new truth was brought to light or invention published; if it lived mostly on the glories of the past, still nothing could deprive Athens of its charm, no degeneracy of the present could rob it of its ancient prestige. It is probable that some of the cities we have mentioned in outward appearance surpassed Rome itself, yet it is with peculiar feelings we regard the capital of the world. It is the heart of all this vast system, the centre of its manifold activities. Not architecturally imposing, if we consider it before its rebuilding in Nero's time, the mass of its population were huddled together in wretched dwellings of wood or brick, rising storey upon storey, even to the elevation of the adjoining hills, and enclosed by narrow and uneven lanes. In those great blocks or *insulæ*, which might find a parallel in modern Paris or Edinburgh, lived the mass of the Roman citizens—or rather they offered them a retreat by night, for during daytime the townsmen were to be found chiefly in the Campus Martius, the theatre, or the baths. The Roman noble, again, dwelt in a stately mansion on the heights, enclosed in gardens which filled up the interval between the adjoining hills, and stretched in some cases even beyond the walls of the city. Attached to these elegant mansions, or clustered at some distance around them, were the lowly dwellings of the numerous freedmen or retainers of the great man. Yet changes and improvements were ever altering the appearance of this

vast collection of human habitations. Great buildings continually rising up took the place of the squalid dwellings of the poor, who were ever huddled more closely together in the unhealthy swamps of the Suburra or Velabrum. The Forum, during the reigns of successive Emperors, was cleared of its shops and dwelling-houses to make room for spacious Temples and Basilicas, and invested with a splendour worthy of the official seat of the sovereign people. If we inquire as to the outward condition of the population, we shall find that if there was no wealth, there existed no great want. There was enough to satisfy the necessities of a careless and improvident people. Living much in the open air, in a climate indisposing them to great exertion, their needs were few; the public dole of corn and of money sufficed them.

Never at any former period of the Roman State had it been more completely guarded from internal commotion or from outward attack. Communication by water and by land was safe and easy; by the energy of Pompey the sea had been completely cleared of pirates; the empire was traversed by excellent roads, whose milestones indicated everywhere the distance from the capital, and seemed an invisible finger denoting, even in the remotest regions, the presence of the sovereign people.

And yet, though the outward aspect of things was imposing and brilliant, decay was written on all this vast structure. Decrepitude was already there—not of age, but as of one who lived a too severe or dissipated youth, and has prematurely exhausted his energies. Something gross and material had ever been the prosperity of Rome; even at its best and palmiest days it had been sustained by nothing much higher than

the rude military virtue of courage, and the endurance, self-reliance, and devotion to a common interest which are necessary to ensure success. And now in the mass of the citizens these virtues were declining, and there was no regenerating principle ready to take their place, to inspire society with a new glow of heroism and patriotic zeal, to give it a new tenure of vigorous life. The peace that prevailed was outward and deceitful. To the watchful ear, amidst the still flow of the national existence, there might be heard a murmur showing it was approaching rapidly a fearful abyss. The cohesion that held together the jarring elements of the vast empire might at any moment be dissolved. It was the peace of exhaustion, or of a volcano lulled into a short repose, but only gaining time to burst into a final and fearful overthrow. The peace of Rome during the early emperors was that of the lake which has gathered its waters from opposite and distant sources, and for a time they seem to rest in its calm depths; but it is only a seeming pause—they are hurrying on to the noise and fury of the cataract. To a prescient mind, even in Augustus's time, or to one who had thoughtfully studied the history and signs of the past, it would not have been difficult to foretell that a great revolution was impending. All the elements of change and dissolution were already at work, though not so manifest as a few generations afterwards.

Look at the *social* aspects of the time. The small Italian farmers, who had hitherto been the strength and backbone of military Rome, who had preserved later than any others its antique style of virtue, had disappeared: their holdings had been sold or absorbed in the possessions of great landlords, wrought by slaves hired on lease, or in many cases suffered to fall out

of cultivation; and they themselves had been floated into the idle and improvident population of the capital and of the larger towns. In the neighbourhood of Rome wheat and corn were no longer grown; it was found more profitable to use the land as gardens to rear fruit and vegetables, by the sale of which large sums were realised. The population of the city was dependent on the supplies of wheat from Egypt, North Africa, Sardinia; and the gradual exhaustion of the soils of these countries, and the evils connected with forced labour, were every year making this source of supply more precarious. If we turn to the condition of the Roman people, we find them thoughtless and improvident—a source of real danger to the State. We find the Senate—the ancient nobility of Rome—clinging tenaciously to the traditions of their class, priding themselves upon their wealth and their descent, but shorn by the caprice of successive emperors of real power and of the privileges they once so lavishly enjoyed—shut out from the responsibilities of a public career, and in too many cases betaking themselves instead to a life of luxury and excess. During the bloodshed of the civil war their ranks had been decimated, and their place was occupied by the sons of wealthy speculators and contractors—a class who, under the reign of Augustus, had come forward into place and favour. These were the *equites*, or knights, who now constituted a middle class in Rome. In them the Roman blood was less pure and unmixed. They were the wealthy traders—the men who, under Government, had farmed provinces, and had grown rich, often in consequence of their exactions. Thirdly, came the freedmen, the emancipated slaves and retainers of the Roman noble—a class often insolent in the consciousness of their newly acquired privileges, often flatterers and sycophants

of the great; yet possessed of a fair share of intelligence and versatility, and by means of these qualities winning their way to the imperial notice and favour, to the exclusion of the nobility.

If now we ask what was the *moral* condition of this society, the answer must be a very unfavourable one. Society was profoundly corrupt at its root and throughout all its departments. It was not merely corrupt in some of its sections; but as a whole, though individuals might here and there present brilliant exceptions, it was disorganised. At no time has the moral standard of any pagan society been high; but here was a society rapidly losing its old virtues of courage, constancy, love of country, without acquiring those suited to a new stage of existence. The demoralisation of Roman society has been ascribed to three causes—the empire, slavery, and gladiatorial shows. But is not this to confound cause with effect? These three great evils were merely the outcome of the depravity of a society which had utterly lost every standard of truth and rectitude. Lust, cruelty, excess of all kinds in the highest quarters, reigned unchecked; and the moral contamination, descending from the Palatine, speedily found its way to the low and squalid dens of the multitude. The Gladiatorial games were a perpetual school of cruelty. Masters had unlimited power of torture and death over their slaves; and this power, notwithstanding the humane efforts of some emperors to moderate it, seems to have been freely exercised. The banquets of the great and wealthy were scenes of lust, of excess, of cruelty, seasoned with the most petty and childish amusements. Legitimate marriage was denied to slaves; their union was unrecognised by law. In the excesses of wickedness women went to such lengths, that men refused to go through the forms

of marriage with persons so abandoned; and in vain did Augustus pass laws with the view of encouraging legitimate unions. Roman matrons of the highest rank, in order to escape the legal penalties against infidelity, and to shake off the last remaining restraints of decency, inscribed their names in the lists of legalised vice. It has sometimes been said that these pictures of the depravity of Roman society have been overdrawn; but looking at the unanimous consent of writers, serious and sarcastic alike—of the grave historian Tacitus, and of the indignant satirist Juvenal—it is impossible to exaggerate the completeness of the corruption.

With this decay in morals coincided the decay and extinction of positive religious belief. There probably never was a time in which scepticism has reigned more triumphant than in the century that preceded, or the half century that followed, the beginning of the Christian era. The old national and local beliefs as a power and influence had died out of men's minds; the newer forms of a universal world-embracing faith were yet scarcely visible. The Roman religion had never been more than a local worship, an institution of their national life, the accompaniment of their military power, the genius of the people expressed under a religious form. It was not like the Egyptian rites and symbols, a vast system of nature worship—or like the light and graceful creations of Greek fancy, a system of philosophy or poetry clothed in a religious garb; it was merely the frigid personification of certain virtues deemed essential to the Roman type of character. Under these sanctions, invoking the aid of Jupiter, or Juno, or Mars, or the lesser tutelary deities, making vows to them, presenting offerings upon their shrine, the Roman legionaries had often marched to unexpected

spoils and victory. Under the patronage of these powerful beings, the enterprises of his State had prospered, but the real Goddess, whom every true Roman worshipped, was Rome herself. The religious ceremonies were merely an ornament and supplement of his national existence—a bribe to the gods to be propitious to the commonwealth. Rome was the only object of his sincere devotion, the love of country was the only principle that had power to kindle a religious warmth in his cold heart; but now, under the growth of other influences, this love, too, was fading. The Roman citizen was ever more and more debarred from any share in the management of his country's affairs; the government had passed into the hands of one man. Luxury and vice were fast dissolving the public spirit; a crowd of diverse and strange nationalities were pressing into the bounds of the empire, were mixing with the free Roman, and acquiring gradually the rights of his citizenship. Rome was no longer a conquering queen sitting in the midst of her subject populations, she was rather the centre and metropolis of a vast heterogeneous dominion. The deities of the conquered peoples had been annexed as well as the countries over whom they presided—they had been received and enrolled in the Roman Pantheon; and this mixture of conflicting creeds, this conciliation of jarring mythologies, this comparative theology of the day, had added immensely to the confusion of thought and scepticism which prevailed. Rome, though she had conquered Greece, had never borrowed much of its theology, which was probably in genius and character too akin to her own. But the venerable religions of the East, the mysterious rites, the solemn initiations and new births, had found favour and acceptance in the capital. Isis,

Æsculapius, Mithras, Serapis, had many votaries in the fashionable circles of Rome. Among the ladies of rank were their most enthusiastic and ardent worshippers. A tide of Oriental customs and superstitions was borne into the capital, probably it had its source at Alexandria, where a vast discordant population of Eastern nationalities dwelt together. From the same source, also, it is possible Jewish rites and beliefs had been introduced, and had also, among the female population of the capital, a large following.

We have attempted to draw a faint sketch of the Roman Empire at the time of its greatest outward prosperity, in the first century of our era, and it must be allowed the picture is a melancholy one. The outcome of many centuries of progress, military success, national consolidation, material wellbeing, was a scepticism and a despondency unparaleled in history, dissolution of moral ties, decline of public spirit, and of domestic virtues. It is a warning to those of our own day who so confidently point to a steady growth of materialism in science, in public manners, in individual belief, as the symptom and agent of social wellbeing and of national progress, that in the age when such materialism had attained its most assured triumph, was the time when society stood on the verge of utter ruin. Not from any quarter of the heathen world came the counter influence which was to save society in its need, not from currupt Rome, not from Greece which had outlived its glories, not from civilisation or philosophy or material progress came the needed succour, but from a quarter of the world which was singularly deficient in all these respects. From the little country of Syria, and the despised nation of the Jews, came an influence which, when the glories of Augustus and the virtues

of ancient Rome faded, was to take up the work of civilisation and of regeneration, and carry it into higher developments. Stoicism might rear a few fine characters, men of strong will and unconquerable fidelity to duty, but it was powerless to affect the mass of society. The stern school of war might raise up along the frontiers of the empire men of the old Roman type—patient, brave, loyal to their country and to the ungrateful masters whom they served; but these were only brilliant exceptions to the general depravity—regeneration was to come from another source.

We have said that the society of the epoch was hopelessly corrupt, and if we look at the outward and representative types of it, the statement is worthy of acceptance. Court life, as seen in the early Emperors and their favourites, was certainly altogether corrupt; official life, as represented by the rapacious Proconsul, the usurer and extortioner of subject provinces; aristocratic life, as represented by the degenerate noble of the empire, were altogether corrupt. The rabble of the great city—those who divided their existence between the theatre, the Campus Martius, and the baths, between mean partaking of the State bounty and outcry against the State which fed them—was certainly corrupt. Still the same, or nearly the same thing, might be said of other conditions of society far removed from that of which we are speaking. In the pages of History it is ever the evil which comes most prominently to view, while the everyday toil, the quiet flow of life, the intercourse of business or of friendship, the charities that bind together human life, pass unheeded and unrecorded. We may be certain that even in the worst days of the Roman State there was that amount of mutual trust and goodwill without which society could

not continue to exist, the duties of daily life were discharged with sufficient fidelity among large portions of people. There were still the charities of parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, friend and neighbour. There must have been a large amount of dissent from the wickedness around; a public opinion forming silently in disapproval of these evils and a desire of better things. It could have been no utterly hopeless condition of society in which Christianity achieved so signal and remarkable triumph. Divine providence did not present its last crowning gift to mankind until it had prepared a soil fit for receiving it. There must have been not only the sinful, the weary, the burdened, who welcomed this solace to their spiritual natures, but the nobler sort, whose souls rebelled against the existing order of things and anxiously sought for a better. Let us try to consider how far those influences extended which have been supposed to account completely for the progress of the Gospel. An opinion had spread throughout the world, shared by Jew and Gentile alike, that one should come forth from the East who should be master of the world. This opinion is recorded in terms so distinct, alike in the glowing verses of Virgil and in the sober prose of the historian Tacitus, that there can be no hesitation in admitting it. So firm a hold had this presentiment obtained over the minds of men, that Vespasian, who had fulfilled a term of office as proconsul of Syria, was held to have fulfilled it; and to him a series of miracles and prodigies were referred in some respects answering to those ascribed to our Lord. So rapid were the means of communication, so constant the intercourse maintained in those days between all parts of the civilised world, that the Gospel, not long after it was published in Judea, found its way

to Rome. St Paul, on his first visit to the city (A.D. 61), found a community of Christians already established and separate from the Jews. If we may judge from the names mentioned in his salutations at the close of his letter to the Romans, the converts were principally of Greek or Jewish origin, probably the latter constituted the majority of the Christian community; they were Jews who had already renounced even a nominal connection with Judaism, many of them freedmen or retainers, whose dwellings were clustered beside the spacious mansions of the emperor or nobles. They had separated, it is probable, from the bulk of their countrymen—from their narrowness, their turbulence, their unspirituality, the political aspect they gave to their religious beliefs, and their hopes of a Messiah. They were perhaps, as regards moral tone, the best men of the city—men in whom had long existed germs of a higher life, and the hope of a regenerated society, religious, but not fanatical, profoundly dissatisfied with the existing state of things, yet not deluding themselves with the hope of improvement from mere outward change or political deliverance, brother-spirits to those who in another city had waited for the coming Messiah and found Him, not in a secular prince, but in one who had sway over their hearts and lives. Their hopes, their wishes, their particular views, they would, doubtless, be willing to communicate to those around them as occasion suggested, or they might find men willing to receive them.

The frightful persecution which, three years after the arrival of St Paul, overtook them under Nero, if it decimated their ranks, would not have the effect of quelling their spirit or of making their hopes and longings less keen; on the contrary, it would bring their opinions and their way of life more decidedly under the public view,

and win for them, if not converts, a number of interested and sympathising friends.

Meanwhile the organisation of the infant Church was steadily progressing; it was being consolidated into that form in which it would best be fitted to resist alike the fiery ordeal of persecution and the temptations of worldly ease and prosperity, which now for centuries alternately would be its portion. The communities of pagan worshippers had been a loose and disorganised body, scarcely admitting of any corporate union. The Christian Church was to present the spectacle of a compact unity—knit around one head, built upon one foundation, and extending its cares and its interests even to the humblest and remotest of its members. The imposing unity of the empire, with its prince at Rome, represented by his legates and deputies throughout all the world, was to have its counterpart in the Christian Church, with its graduated hierarchy and officers extending over all lands. It has been represented by one school of writers that the Christian Church was at first a pure democracy, there being only one class of officers, or if several classes, that these were on a footing of equality with one another, that a usurping hierarchy gradually crept in destroying the beautiful parity of the primitive believers. In the face of history and the known facts of human nature it is difficult to credit this. There are no traces in the New Testament of such primitive equality. The different orders are already there, though perhaps less defined and specialised than afterwards.[1] If human nature then was what it is nowadays, the presbyters of the early Church would not easily have yielded to an unjust encroachment and invasion of their rights, without some signs of

[1] See note at end of this chapter.

struggle being left on record. The definite unity which was afterwards to emerge had not yet distinctly appeared, but it was there already in germ and outline. Circumstances would vary in different churches, but the course of development in each would be essentially the same. The hand of Providence was guiding them to that form of government which was the only one fitted to accomplish the great mission of the Church, to gird it with the strength and constancy which it needed under the fires of persecution, to secure for it union and perpetuity. An uncontested and seemingly authentic succession of bishops, from the Apostolic times downwards, has been recorded for the leading cities and churches of the empire, and we may not inconsiderately set aside the universal testimony of Christian antiquity. The Episcopal authority, if we do not admit our Lord's commission, and primitive tradition pointing to its immediate institution, may have originated in a manner somewhat like the following. The Apostles were at first the sole depositaries of authority, the governing body in the several churches which they had founded; but as each apostle was in fact a missionary, an itinerant teacher or evangelist, over a large range of territory, as his communications with and visit to the churches he had founded became fewer and more irregular, it was found necessary in his absence to set apart the presbytery, the body of religious teachers, or some distinguished member of them to act as his substitutes. Of the latter we have an instance in the appointment of Titus as bishop of Crete in the absence of the Apostle Paul. But as the places of the apostles gradually became vacant by old age, persecution, or death, it would be fitting to associate with them in their office or name as their successors some distinguished member of the Church

whom the general voice of the community agreed in nominating for this dignity. The manner of nomination thus begun would continue, the fittest man by assent of the Christian community being designated for this office. In the days when the episcopate was a post of special danger, the competition for it would naturally not be great; but the bravest champion of Christ would be named, and the office would be one not so much of power as of influence, not conferred in a formal manner but on account of pre-eminent goodness, and its powers and privileges would not be so clearly defined as afterwards. "The principle of subordination," says Dean Milman, "was inseparable from the humility of the early converts. Rights are never clearly defined till they are contested, nor is authority limited so long as it rests on general reverence. When on the one side aggression, and on the other jealousy and mistrust begin, then it must be fenced by usage and defined by law." But whatever may be our opinion as to the origin and validity of the Episcopal office, there can be no question that, in the circumstances of the early Church, it was the only system which, humanly speaking, could have preserved itself under the perpetual and fierce attacks to which it was exposed. The principle of subordination and unity that actuated the whole body, the one spirit pervading the head and the humblest member alike, the ready obedience to the counsels and commands of a recognised superior—these were the real causes of the strength and compactness of the infant Church, of its advance in spite of failure and discomfiture, of its triumph though the waves of persecution beat thick and fast upon it, of the admiration which it was able to extort even from its adversaries. As wonderful success crowned the efforts of the Church, as

one point after another was gained from heathenism, as the Roman empire fell helplessly under its sway, the enthusiasm of the believers was heightened and confirmed, a wonderful confidence and joy possessed them; they beheld the promises of the Lord visibly fulfilled, and they had an assurance firmer than any outward evidence could give that His mission and His gospel were divine.

Various natural causes have been assigned for the success of Christianity. In a question so large, and where so many different elements come into play, it is difficult to assign to each cause its due importance. We need not hesitate to allow that divine providence launched the Gospel on a world prepared to receive it, but we may easily exaggerate the value to be allotted to each separate influence. Some of these in earlier times and states of society would have wrought not favourably for Christianity, but the reverse. It is said that the softening and humanising influence of Greek manners and refinement predisposed men to the reception of the Gospel. But these had been introduced into Rome a century and a half before the Christian era, and instead of disposing the Romans to a nobler and purer life, had greatly corrupted them. It is said that the long peace of the Antonines, the prosperity and even the luxury of the empire, favoured the cause of Christ. But in themselves these influences were likely to deter men from a pure and spiritual religion. It is alleged that the advance of scepticism, the disintegration of old ideas, was a powerful auxiliary to the spread of the Gospel. But rejection of an old faith, and eager reception of a new, do not always go hand in hand. In Japan, at the present time, we are told there is rapid decay of the old beliefs; there is great eagerness to advance the outward and material prosperity of the country,

but we do not hear of any marked disposition to receive Christianity; on the contrary, the popular attention is turned away towards secular pursuits. We may then allow their due weight to the causes assigned by Gibbon, the imposing organisation of the Church, its alleged miracles, its higher morality, its promises and threats of a future life, and yet hold these to be only an imperfect explanation of the success of Christianity. We may admit with him that natural causes were at work in the spread of Christianity, without admitting his implied inference that Christianity is no more than the product of natural causes. These were the mere instruments, prepared and arranged by God himself, for the working out of His purposes. Some influence we must allow to Prophecy—not only the fulfilling of the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures to the extent of which men could estimate and measure, but also the accomplishment of the vague expectations and wishes of the heathen world. Something we must allow to Miracles, not only an indispensable accompaniment to every religious manifestation of those times—the bell which summoned men to inquire into the claims of the religion presented; but making every allowance for their credulous disposition, their tendency to see everywhere the wonderful and miraculous, there are still a number of well-authenticated facts which cannot be disposed of on the ground of imposture or invention. Some of those are extraordinary coincidences midway between the providential and the miraculous, suggesting faith rather than compelling it; others, again, are plainly supernatural. Conceding to these causes their due importance, there were certain powerful natural influences at work which assisted to procure the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

There was a dreary *political* outlook; a blank and utter despair had fallen upon men's minds. The dark spectre of Barbarism had looked in upon them; its shadow had threatened to close upon the civilised world. The miseries of family life, the failure of other religious systems, the exposure of the shameless deceptions which attended them, were the means, even in the most favoured centres of civilisation, of drawing many disciples to the cause of Christianity. These causes — active more or less in every stage of the world's history — have never been so potent and operative as in the declining days of the Roman power.

The *spiritual* instincts of men were powerfully awakened. In the hearts of the religious heathen the sense of sin, the agony of remorse, the crying out for a fuller light than they had yet attained, the misery of the ever-present struggle between the flesh and the spirit, were tendencies which found expression in the later and softened school of Stoicism. To the same system, which furnished some of the noblest men in the early stages of the empire—men who were as the glimmerings of the dawn between the darkness of heathenism and the full glories of Christianity—we owe also the recognition of the truth of all men's equality before God in the common relation of sons to a Father; a prolific thought which, amalgamating with and fortifying the improved expanding Roman jurisprudence, gradually opened a way to the obliteration of all distinction between freeman and slave, master and subject, Roman and provincial, leading to the recognition of the equal rights and privileges of mankind as members of a civil society, and so, by natural consequence, as members and citizens of a

spiritual society reaching throughout all lands and to all races, whose Founder and Ruler is God. We are far from saying that this thought was original in the Stoical philosophy; it was probably borrowed from the Jewish or Christian writings, where the thought of the Equality and the Brotherhood of all men, and of the calling of all to the knowledge of God equally with the Jew, is a familiar and a favourite one. If, however, both these lines of thought were independent, it is interesting to see how they combine and coalesce towards a common end. It is difficult to disentangle and assign to each respective influence its proper place and importance—the secular and the sacred react on each other; the outward unity of the Empire may have familiarised men's minds to the idea of the unity of the Church. From a view of the combined influences alone, we are able to gain an intelligent apprehension of the whole situation. Christianity, as embodied in the gracious person of its Founder, satisfied all wants; it had an answer to the questions of the philosopher; it met the needs of the aspiring spirit; it condescended to the humblest, to soothe the mourner and the penitent, and, by the power of a divine indwelling presence, to combat the spirit of lust, of covetousness, of intemperance, with which the world was possessed. Above all, it was in the holy lives of its disciples that the Christian writers had their most powerful grounds of appeal, and the heathen the most convincing proof of the truth of the new religion. They might dispute its credentials, they might cavil at its arguments, but they could not deny the fact of a new and regenerating agency powerfully displayed before them. They saw that, unlike the proud and exclusive systems of their philosophy, Christianity was able to reach the masses,

and strangely to influence them. They saw the Christian disciple glorying in his profession, and striving to vindicate his position as a member of the Christian Church, and to evince his gratitude for the benefits conferred on him by a worthy and consistent life. They beheld the licentious become chaste, the intemperate sober, and the gladiator and the pander to vice relinquish their shameful but profitable callings; they saw the spirit of brotherly love that prevailed, the care of the Christian community for the young, the aged, and the feeble of its members; they saw the care and sympathy it extended to the poor, the infirm, the suffering, even beyond its pale. They saw the Hospital arise, an institution unknown before; they saw the courage and constancy of the Christian confessor even amidst sufferings and death; and as they beheld all this, expressed and realised beforehand in the person of its Founder, so loving and attractive, so divine and yet so human, they were fain to own that here was a system unheard of before, carrying with it its own credentials, that God was with it of a truth.

Lastly, the Zeal of the Converts was one principal means of promulgating the new faith, as it was one of the clearest proofs of the sincerity of their profession. The heathen worshipper and the philosopher having no clear or deep-rooted conviction, being perhaps incredulous as to the attainment of truth, or selfish and indifferent as to the possession of it, or thinking that truth was the exclusive possession of a few, cared not to communicate his opinions, was imbued with no propagandist zeal. Every Christian, on the contrary, was a missionary of the faith he professed. In the diffusion of it nothing came amiss to him,—no sex, nor age, nor condition was beyond the scope of his proselytising

activity. No occasion was too trivial, no place too solemn or too mean to be passed over as the scene of his activity. Alike on the Sabbath, in the house of prayer, among devout Jews and proselytes, and on the ordinary occasions of life, in a walk by the seaside, or a chance meeting in some desert way, the Missionaries of the new faith sought to impress others with a sense of those truths of which they themselves were so profoundly convinced. There was a freemasonry, so to speak, among Christian believers; a new and secret society had sprung up within the empire, having its own signs and watchwords, and the family and the social meeting were the scenes of its activity. The Christian priest or missionary, disguised perhaps as a traveller or man of commerce, entered quietly the Christian household; by certain sacred words he is recognised and welcomed; his mission fulfilled, he is forwarded on his dangerous way. Wonderful was the success which attended those first efforts for the promotion of the Gospel. Christianity, repulsed in the land of its birth, achieved a wonderful success throughout the Roman empire. Within nine years of the death of its Founder, a community of Christians was established at Rome. Travelling was easier and more rapid in those times than in any subsequent age up to the present century. The teachers of the new faith, making Rome their centre, went up and down the world, indefatigably publishing the good news of the Gospel. Asia Minor was filled with disciples. In the second century so numerous were they in Bithynia, that it is stated by Pliny, the procurator of the province, that the temples were almost deserted. Africa and Greece were filled with Christian communities. Spain and Gaul too had caught the infection, and were filled with the glow of a new

life. The Apostle Paul is said to have preached the Gospel in both these countries. The Roman power and language provided the medium by means of which the new religion was propagated. The Christian Churches were becoming powerful in numbers, but they were still more powerful in their faith and zeal.

Note.

Confusion on the subject of the Orders of the early Church has arisen from the fact that, in Apostolic times, owing to the Christian communities being small and scattered, the Bishop had probably in some cases no Presbyter under him. The Bishops of the New Testament were numerous, missionary, probably with no very defined territorial jurisdiction, and sometimes absorbed in their own office the Presbyterate, having under them only Deacons. Hence the passages in the Epistles in which Bishops and Deacons alone are mentioned.

CHAPTER II.

DOGMA.

Of the new Religion thus bursting suddenly upon the world, one of the principal characteristics was the prominence it assigned to Dogma. In this it differed essentially from the cultus of heathenism: they maintained no dogma, no scheme of Theology as part of their system. They were simply acts of devotion to various deities, conceived according to the tastes and feelings of the worshipper. But with Christianity appeared a number of dogmas, some of them new and distinctive. The Trinity, the Atonement, the office of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual communion of Christians with God by means of the Church and Sacraments; all these, implicitly contained in the Scriptures, were in process of time embodied in a creed and offered to the acceptance of Christendom. They have been objected to as mere subtleties of speculation, as lying beyond the region of human reason, of no importance to human life, incapable of proof or disproof. This view of them is most incorrect. They would assuredly not have been offered to mankind if they had not met some spiritual want, presented a solution of some haunting problem of the human mind. The doctrine of the Trinity meets the discouragement which every one has

felt in the thought that God is a remote inaccessible Being, dwelling apart from His creatures, entering into no fellowship with them. By its doctrine of the Son it bridges over the gulf which separates the finite from the infinite; it gives us, too, the idea of our sonship. It separates Christianity both from Judaism and Mahometanism, and from a cold and arid Deism which has never truly influenced human life. The Atonement appeals to man's sense of sin and desire of deliverance from it; it represents to some extent the old pagan idea of sacrifice, but free from the imperfections and immorality attending it; it is connected with that law of association innate in human nature by which we transfer the feeling due to one being to another, by which we regard even a stranger with friendly eyes, because he is related to one dear to us. It is involved, too, in the headship of Christ over His Church. He, as the typical Man, head of humanity, must share in the sufferings of His members, in their trials and imperfections. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit supplies the invaluable truth that human life and history are in every age the scene of a Divine activity, that men are guided perpetually and strengthened and purified by a power other than themselves. It teaches that the supernatural and miraculous are not relegated to the distant past, that Christians are not tied to any unbending rule or mere letter of Scripture, but are free to guide themselves according to the dictates of their conscience and the enlightenment of their age. The doctrine of the Church and Sacraments confirms to us the truth that the Divine life is still moving in the world, and shows us some of the points through which it comes into contact with human life.

The great interest of our religion, of course, centres

around the person of its Founder. It seems an astounding assertion that He who moved in lowly form among the most narrow and provincial people of antiquity, the Jewish peasant, seemingly ignorant of many things, subject to physical weakness, should be Incarnate God, the Son of God, or even a nature higher than human. It may be asked, Is such a statement, even if true, capable of verification? Is it possible for any human mind to pass the barrier which divides the visible from the invisible world, and to substantiate this assertion? Yet the same objection may be urged to any statements that deal with a region beyond the phenomenal, that profess to transcend the limits of human experience. May not the same objection be raised to the arguments in favour of the existence of God? There is here also a process which the strict rules of inductive reasoning do not justify, from narrow and finite premises we arrive at a conclusion touching the Infinite. If the one process is regarded as a mere concession to the devout imagination, the craving of the soul after a religious ideal, may not the other be regarded as a concession to an equally subjective emotion?[1] In this case we possess the only evidence which the nature of the subject permits. We have the distinct assertion of Christ Himself as to His divine origin and nature. We have the deep and ineradicable craving of mankind for one who should be truly God, perfect and supreme, yet representative of the human side of God, bridging over the immense gulf which separates between perfect strength and holiness, and weakness and unholiness; the Son of God not blinding mankind by the display of dazzling splendour, but in a softened and subdued light revealing the divine glory according as men could

[1] See R. H. Hutton's 'Theological Essays.'

bear it. This is the very idea of a divine revelation, that it makes accessible to man that which was before overpowering and inaccessible. That the divine nature should be confined in a human nature has been illustrated by the supposed case of a great genius crippled and paralysed by disease, yet still preserving under this semblance of weakness his mighty strength of soul and intellect. These thoughts will doubtless appear unreal and speculative to the mind which believes that the only knowledge possible is the power of tracing outward sequences, or to the spirit dazzled by the march of physical discovery; but to one who holds, as a primary truth, that there lies beyond the sphere of our knowledge, not mere necessary and mechanical laws, but a Free or Intelligent Will, they will have a certain worth and cogency.

Looking from the mere historical standpoint, and striving to disengage the question from all doctrinal prepossessions, the simplest impression of Jesus of Nazareth is, that He was a representative of the old race of Jewish saints and prophets, like Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament, reproving sin, recalling the people to the ways of truth, disentangling the law from the mass of fable and of tradition which had gathered around it; working miracles, and by the holiness of His life, and the beauty and elevation of His teaching, leading men into deeper and more earnest fellowship with their heavenly Father. But we cannot even superficially examine the documents in which His life is recorded without concluding that this first impression does not at all answer to the full reality of His life and character. Profoundly he differs from the Old Testament saint and wonder-worker. He does not deliver prophecies about some great one to come, He is Himself the sum and fulfilment of prophecy. He is the Messiah

to set free His people from oppression, and to restore the faded glories of David; He is also the Deliverer who comes to break down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, to bring the latter into the privileges of the Jews. But while we gaze at the figure thus presented to us, the aspect of His countenance changes, a superhuman form rises full before us. The Jewish garb and colouring disappears, and we behold a Son of Man, at once the representative, the flower, the ideal, of our race. But does the impression given us of His character stop here? He is a Being more than human, the medium between God and man, softening and shading for our vision those views of the divine nature which else would be too dazzling. Nay, at times the stupendous secret bursts upon us in the Scriptures that He is God Incarnate, coequal with the Father, answering to the Logos of Greek and Jewish sages, invested with all those attributes which theology has assigned to that person. He is also the second Adam, by His self-conquest and victory over sin, reversing the defeat of the first Adam, and opening up a new vista of hope for mankind by His death on the cross, in which He appears both priest and victim. He is the true Paschal Lamb and atonement for sin, dispensing with all ancient sacrifices, annulling the law by fulfilling it. As the substitute for His personal presence with His disciples, and to continue the work He had begun, the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity, is promised to abide with His Church for ever. This simple personality of Jesus of Nazareth becomes transfigured as we contemplate it, and almost without leaving the historical treatment of the subject, or wandering into theological discussion, we find attached to it the whole circle of doctrine—the Trinity,

the Atonement, the Holy Spirit, the conception of a continued Divine presence and indwelling with the Church. We refer to these at present, not so much in view of their intrinsic truth or Scriptural warrant, as of the part they were afterwards to play in the history of the Church, and of its doctrinal development.

Much has been said as to the originality of Jesus Christ, His character and teaching; but originality must here be taken rather in the sense of expanding and illustrating old truths, of summing up and setting them in new lights, than of constructing a system out of nothing. If we look on History as the grand evolution of a divine purpose, the unfolding of germs which existed from the beginning,—if we regard it rather as a succession of Divine communications reaching from the primitive one given to man in conscience, through the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations than as a series of leaps and surprises—then in this ordered succession of events Christianity must take its place as the highest and latest Revelation. It must move on old lines, and be a continuance of that which was from the beginning; and not the continuance only, but the completion of it. And this is what we find in the teaching of Christ. It is cast in the mould of old Jewish prophecy; it presupposes the truth of the Jewish religion. The tone, the treatment, the lines of thought, are the same. It is not in one sense a new creation so much as the rearranging of old materials to form another structure. The utterances of Jewish psalmist and prophet, treasured in his heart, combined with what Christ drew from His own loving study of nature and from fellowship with His heavenly Father, furnished those rich stores of truth and wisdom which He poured forth in many a parable and pregnant saying. It is said that the substance of

some of His parables is to be found in Rabbinical writings, and that even portions of what is called the Lord's Prayer are to be found elsewhere; and this may be so. But never had they been employed with such range and application to the varying wants of humanity. Some of the parables of Christ are prophecies, which in their fulfilment authenticate His mission. Those wonderful parables of the kingdom He established, its gradual growth, its final success, its universality and spirituality—spoken at a time when all probability pointed to failure in His mission—are without a parallel in the history of human insight or successful conjecture. It has been usual with some writers to argue from the perfect human nature of Jesus Christ to His Divine nature. But fully recognising their good intentions, this seems to us a reversal of the proper procedure. If we look at Christ merely as man, we shall meet with some things in His character which stagger us, a boundless self-assertion and confidence strangely at variance with a perfect humanity. Adopting the other course, arguing from His divine to His human attributes, all these seeming difficulties are reconciled and fall into their proper place and harmony.

Let us look now at the moral code Christ adopted as the laws of His new kingdom. A new order of virtues was inaugurated—a new qualification was demanded as necessary for admission into its citizenship. The old heathen virtues of patriotism, public spirit, courage, were replaced by meekness, gentleness, poverty of spirit, submission to injury. These are the graces of a passive, yielding spirit. They belong to the womanly rather than the manly type of character. They are to be looked for rather in the poor and despised of society than in the wealthy and the prosperous. Here was a

vast revolution in the virtues held up to public admiration, but it was a revolution profoundly significant of the outward change society was about to undergo. It was in conformity with the views of the higher spirits of the Jewish race, who represented the chosen people always under the guise of a suffering people. It was an appropriate choice, for the class to whom the Gospel was first mainly preached was the poor, the slave, the neglected, those who wanted help and consolation. It was a symbol of that power by which Christianity was to overcome; for it was to conquer through weakness, was to employ the forgotten and despised portions of humanity to build up a structure of enduring strength. The old fiery virtues of courage, public spirit, proud resistance to calamity, had died out amidst the corruption and dissolution of the times, or survived only in a few isolated grand examples; and the experiment was to be made of a society constituted on a different model and reared on another foundation. The experience of centuries has justified the preference due to these passive graces, and has shown that a society constituted on a supernatural basis, on the sense of human weakness and dependence on God, has even, as regards material stability, an advantage over a society in which the manly virtues are alone recognised. The paradox has been realised—that out of the weakness and extreme spirituality of Christianity have been evolved the robustness and manly strength of the middle ages and the vast fabric of modern civilisation, with the material triumphs and scientific success characteristic of it. These have been the fruit not of a heathen, but of a Christian civilisation.

It has been objected by the Agnostic that the Christian standard is extreme and impracticable, that men

must live for and benefit themselves before they can benefit others, that did the Christian attempt to realise the ideal of his fine enthusiasm for humanity, the results would be disastrous both to the society and the individual. The answer is—first, that Christianity does not forbid, but everywhere assumes, the existence of those self-regarding virtues which must be the basis of enlightened benevolence. Next, that the precept of disinterested welldoing to others would bear a little more strain upon it than it has yet experienced; that it remains to be proved that a society into which more of the sympathetic and disinterested element entered, would be unstable or short-lived. If mutual consideration were shown by employers and employed; if more hearty goodwill were the rule in life; if selfishness and jealousy were replaced by kindness and sympathy,—it remains to be proved that this conduct would hurry on the dissolution of the society in which it was exemplified.

Or if, again, it be said that the cultivation of passive graces of character would lead to want of energy and public spirit, there is here an assertion which cannot be proved. It is among the societies most profoundly influenced by those spiritual ideas—the societies constituted on a religious basis—that the greatest amount of outward energy has been displayed and the triumphs of civilisation have been most conspicuous. He must have read history to little purpose who would attribute to the people of England or Scotland at any stage of their history an inert or phlegmatic character.

One other point deserves to be noticed. The influence of Christianity or of grace on natural disposition does not eradicate nature, does not fuse the character of individuals or of societies into one unvarying mould.

It does not destroy individuality; it sometimes refines and accentuates it. If to-day Englishmen and Irishmen, Teuton and Celt, Slave and Magyar, were to adhere to the same outward form of Christianity, their manners, their institutions, their mental constitutions, would still display diversity. This fact, while it throws light upon the diverse types of the Christian character, explains also much of the seeming failure of Christianity. Religion, while it elevates men to a higher state than they would otherwise attain, is to some extent lowered by its contact with humanity. Its ideal purity is compromised, the lofty standard which at first it set up is departed from. In order to play its part on the theatre of humanity, with its interests, its passions, its inevitable limitations, it has to accommodate itself to human weakness. Religion has been ridiculed for condescending to human weakness and sin: in reality, it was inevitable it should make a compromise with it if it would play its part at all in human life.

Christianity was not, then, to efface the old ethical standard, but to incorporate it with its own higher morality, to modify and elevate it. The virtues on which the old heathen world pre-eminently prided itself, were patriotism, friendship, disinterested love of truth. These, however higher elements might enter into them, were not ethically deserving of high commendation. Friendship was largely the gratification of a natural sympathy or affinity of character; patriotism the pride of clan or family diffused over a wider surface; pursuit of truth often mere intellectual gratification, curiosity, or overweening confidence in one's own opinion. Such, doubtless, in the average man of antiquity, these virtues were, though a nobler specimen was here and there to be found. Christianity incorporated them with

its own code, and gave them a nobler meaning and explanation. The selfish element disappeared when the true love and devotion of man were directed towards a society, a brotherhood, at once intensely human and divine, holding the supreme law of love of one towards another, yet based upon the love of God.

The specially Christian virtues have at times been misrepresented by writers of the anti-Christian school. None appear more specially Christian than humility, self-sacrifice, and self-forgetfulness. Humility has its root in the sense of our relation to God, our weakness in comparison with His strength, our sin as opposed to His holiness. It is clearly a true and natural attitude of the soul, once our relationship to God is acknowledged. Yet it has been spoken of by some writers as incompatible with self-respect. Humility, we are told, is the virtue that distinguishes the Christian; self-respect distinguished the heathen. In reality there is no opposition at all between them. The Christian, because his creed assures him that he is heir and partaker of a divine and immortal nature, is bound to entertain a higher sense of self-respect than he who regards himself from a natural point of view as merely the highest of the animals. Self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice have, we are told, an exaggerated value in the Christian system. But they are recommended to us, not from any romantic ideas of their own intrinsic excellence, but because at the command of God and of conscience the lower animal nature is to be sacrificed. Again—and this is a formidable objection—we are told that Christianity discourages the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, that it gives to the mind a bias and predisposition unfavourable to impartial inquiry. Regarding this objection we would only say that it cannot

be well maintained in view of the immense impetus given to all kinds of intellectual pursuit by our Christian civilisation.

But, again, it is said an ethical standard is set up by Christianity, which not only aims at controlling and improving the natural element, but almost at destroying it, introducing not only the supernatural but the unnatural. Christianity, as we learn it from the words of its Founder, as interpreted and understood by the early Church, seems bent on making war on those primitive instincts of our nature, those innocent and legitimate feelings which form the foundations of human activity. It is unquestionable, however some seek to explain away the fact, that Christ recommends counsels of perfection—enjoins on certain of His followers who can attain to this rule, perfect chastity, poverty, and obedience, seeming thus to do violence to these instincts, which lead to the upbuilding of the family, to the acquisition and diffusion of wealth, to all social enterprise, and to the achievements of genius. He thus seeks to control man in the exercise of his highest powers, his will, his intellect, his social ambition; and the timid or interested apologists of religion who seek to explain away those portions of Scripture which are at variance with their views, will be forced in the end to take up the position of the sceptical opponents of Christianity. But, in truth, this seeming antagonism is the simple result of the fact that Christianity claims to be a supernatural religion. If this element be admitted at all, it must sometimes curb and control the natural; if man has duties as the citizen of a heavenly kingdom as well as of a temporal, these may at times come into collision; if the present condition of man and his relations towards God be abnormal and dislocated

by sin, then mortification, a certain imperfection as regards this world, may be his chief duty. The medicine which in a healthy constitution is hurtful and unneeded, may be the greatest benefit when introduced into a wounded and sickly frame. Assuming man is a being spiritually diseased, Asceticism may be the highest law of life that can be set before him. Christianity comes before us not merely as a revelation of the unseen, a guide to the higher life, but as a remedy for the sinful and diseased state of man.

Besides, in recommending this voluntary mortification, the Gospel speaks to those who are under a special call, who have a special and dangerous post allotted to them, and who are bound to it by a special profession. "No man who warreth entangleth himself in affairs of this life," says the apostle. "Every one who striveth in the games is temperate." Every one who is intensely earnest in any pursuit, must in some points deny himself, strip himself of many things convenient and allowable to others not circumstanced as he is. The inquirer after knowledge must deny himself hours of rest, the sailor must watch through the long night, the sentinel must not slumber when the enemy's outposts are at hand. The sceptic has often told the Christian that he is only half in earnest; and we must not accuse those first simple disciples of want of knowledge, whatever we may think of their worldly discretion or of their exegetical resources, who, in denuding themselves of worldly good, felt they were only carrying out the counsels of their dearly loved Master.

Let us look, before closing this subject, at some of the leading doctrines of Christianity, and see how far these have modified or incorporated the teachings of nature and the truths embodied in other systems.

The Trinity was a protest against a rigid impassive unity in the Divine Being—the idea that God has never revealed Himself, never stooped to man, but remains in the repose, the isolation of His essential nature. So strong and deep-rooted in man is the antagonism to this idea of a mere unity, that we find traces of an opposite tendency even in systems in which that unity has been most severely maintained. Even the rigid unity embodied in the Creed of the Chinese Confucius is forced in some measure to give way before the desire to find a twofold principle in the origin of the universe. The Logos principle appearing in the later religion of the Jews denoted a like tendency. Traces of a Trinity are to be found in religious systems furthest removed from the Jews; but this may be a mere apparent resemblance. A recent able writer[1] has found a presentiment of this doctrine in ideas prevalent in the pre-Christian world, but among systems widely remote from each other. The Indian mind in the presence of the Infinite found itself very helpless and dependent; it was overmastered by the greatness of outward nature; it grasped the idea of the begetting principle, the Fatherhood of God. The Platonist grasped the idea of the greatness of man; his system told of a universal soul within the individual soul. In the popular mythology man felt himself to be isolated; he felt the need of some one like himself with whom he could hold intercourse. "Mythology broke the solitude by lifting to the level of the Divinity those sharers of man's nature who were believed to be noblest; he found companionship in the glorification of humanity." Thus we arrive at a threefold thought of God reached by the natural theologian —that is, by the religious world which lived before the

[1] Dr Matheson: Baird Lecture.

Cross. We find the thought of a Fatherly or begetting principle, from which humanity emanated; the thought of a Divine Spirit, in which humanity lives and moves and has its being; and the thought of a human form, which humanity can give to the Divine, and through which it can hold communion with the Divine. These various thoughts of God existed in collision or contradiction in the old heathen world; they were drawn together and reconciled, to give a most majestic and soothing, and yet sublime, view of the Divine nature in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Let us only cast a glance on the doctrine of man's immortality. Christianity casts a new light upon it also—surrounding it with new motives and a higher significance. It cannot be said that Christianity discovered this as a new truth; on the contrary, it assumes it as a truth already known, and founded on the instincts of man's nature, but it clears it from the false associations which had grown around it. It had often been dwelt upon in heathen writings; it had been treated as a pleasing hope or dream of mankind in poetry; and its mysteries. But Theology, feeling it was too grave a subject to be trifled with, published it as a Dogma, to be philosophy had expatiated on the thought, trying to conjure up what the future life was like and penetrate into reverently received along with the other truths of Revelation. Heathen speculation had viewed it very much as a physical change, a transition in locality, to be inaugurated by death—a change in man's constitution coincident with a change in his outward circumstances; the Gospel raised it to the rank of a great moral truth, a change begun even in this life, the immortal life of Christ imparted to all who are in communion with Him, overcoming death, and assuring eternal life to His people.

Note.

There are two different aspects under which Christianity may be regarded: either as the natural growth and product of the human mind and of the religious instinct—the highest and noblest, doubtless, but still only one of the products to which the tree of humanity has from time to time given birth; or, on the other hand, as a supernatural manifestation. According to the latter view, Christianity is the revealing of the supernatural in the sphere and nature of man—subject to limitations and imperfections, but still bearing traces of its heavenly origin — the highest stage in the unfolding of a divine purpose, the concentration of the scattered lights which in various ages and religions have appeared to mankind. It is a stream which, fed and nourished from a divine source, has never ceased to wind among the landscape of human life and history, to refresh and gladden it—now discoloured by the unseemly mixture of human ambition, or priestly arrogance, or sectarian hate and rivalry—now almost hidden or flowing beneath the surface of worldly interests; but still by its presence beautifying human existence, and in every age reaching with its blessings some quiet souls, to elevate and comfort them, to raise them above the storms of life, to bring them to a higher and spiritual existence. According as we adopt one or other of these views, will be our criticism of the value and meaning of Christianity—our philosophy of religion. Assuming that religion is merely a natural phenomenon, we shall judge of its worth from its effects on the character and intellect of man, on the wealth and wellbeing of nations; and some such estimate, we find, has often been unconsciously adopted, as when, *e.g.*, the truth of Protestantism as opposed to Catholicism is inferred from the fact that the former has generally been professed by nations conspicuous for wealth and for enterprise. If we adopt the latter view, Christianity, though affected by the human medium through which it flows, presents distinctive features, is not a mere human growth, and must not be judged by the mere standard applicable to human affairs. No mean contribution towards the settlement

of the question is afforded by strictly defining the term supernatural. It may best be defined by contrasting it with its correlatives. There is first the unnatural, which is often confounded with it. Such would be the case supposed by Hume, of a feather being raised in the air when the wind wants ever so little of the force requisite for the purpose; or the marvels of spirit-rapping, as ascribed to the Thaumaturgists of our day. The preternatural is confined to some inexplicable manifestation which can only be ascribed to a malevolent or sinister agency. The supernatural may mean one of two things: first, display of divine power, either by direct fiat of divine will, or the bringing in some higher law of nature to effect some great moral or benevolent purpose, such as healing the sick, or giving sight to the blind; or secondly, an order of supernatural graces and virtues which have no direct bearing on human happiness, such as meekness, chastity, the spirit of martyrdom. It is impossible to leave out of view in this connection remarkable coincidences, providential and bordering on the supernatural, which by the believing mind will be referred to the latter class.

CHAPTER III.

PERSECUTION.

ONE of the marks of the new religion, and proofs of its heavenly origin, was martyrdom. From the beginning of His ministry, Christ had foretold that His disciples should be persecuted and hated of all men for His sake. This was a new manifestation in the history of religious opinion. Religious sects had before persecuted each other out of mere bitterness and strife, or they had been denounced to the State as dangerous to the public peace or morality; but it was a new era in history when a religious body, quiet and inoffensive, pushing its doctrine of non-resistance and non-interference in political affairs to an extreme, was punished solely on account of the unpopularity of its opinions. Yet if we look more steadily at the causes which mainly determine the course of human affairs, the strangeness will in great measure disappear. We shall see that these persecutions, these stonings, burnings, and torments, inflicted on the weak and unoffending Christians, were the price at which a great moral revolution was to be wrought out, and the world rescued from the dominion of evil. The turbid flow of those centuries of embittered passions and wrongs was to issue in the clear majestic expanse of Christian peace and unity. Here, as in other respects,

the conformity was complete between the Church and its Founder. The family likeness was perfect in all these persecutions, in which the Church was ever suffering, yet ever triumphant. In the first great decision before the tribunal of Pilate, we see the type of all the other decisions. Christ suffered in virtue of that mysterious law which enlists against the good the passions, the interests, the prejudices of our nature; and not otherwise was it to be with His disciples.

Look at the history of Christianity thoughtfully; we shall see less reason to wonder at the persecution it encountered. We shall rather, unless we admit a groundwork of good-sense and righteousness in humanity which responds to outward influences, be forced to wonder how, in the face of so many adverse influences, Christianity could make way at all. Against it was arrayed every interest. Consider the intense malice and hatred it provoked among the Jews, who saw their own venerable and glorious system superseded by what seemed a wrong-headed secession from their ranks. Consider how it shocked Philosophy by a system and ideas so adverse to its own; how it came into collision with Paganism, with its vast array of superstitions, and its dependent interests of temples and priesthood, tradesmen and artificers, who under its sanction found a profitable occupation; how it offended the Roman rulers because of its secrecy, its unity, its far-reaching hierarchy, which seemed the counterpart and rival of their own; how it offended the vile because of their vileness, the devout because of their devoutness, the wise because of their wisdom. It arrayed against itself from the beginning a confederacy of the world's powers. On the day of its first trial in the person of its Founder, it enlisted against it Pilate, the stern Roman governor, the

flippant, cultured Herod, and the passionate Jewish priests and people; and these were a prophecy of the opposition it was shortly to meet with in the world. Roman authority, Greek wisdom and subtlety, and Jewish hate, formed a triple alliance against it. Foremost of these in point of time and of intensity we must give the place to Jewish animosity. This appears throughout the records of the Gospel as the inspiring and animating principle of the early Christian persecutions. As Jewish rancour had dragged Christ before a careless judge, so, before the eyes of a careless and wondering pagan world, the Jews followed up the early Christian disciples, ever appearing as their enemies, their accusers, and their executioners. To gratify their embittered and angry feelings, they do not scruple to have recourse to falsehood, pretending to be loyal subjects of Cæsar, concerned only lest the new sect sprung from their midst should endanger his authority, should compromise their position with regard to him. They conspire against Paul at Jerusalem, binding themselves by an oath to put him to death; they employ assassins, they appeal to the interests of the artificers at Ephesus, representing to the powerful guild of workmen that their craft was in danger; they excite against him the populace of Philippi, telling them, if this new sect has its way, the hope of their gains is gone. They drag him before the proconsul Gallio at Corinth; in every city they follow him, scheming and calumniating him; in the excess of their persecuting zeal they outrage even the Roman law. They work upon the inconstancy of the weaker sex, and are not above having recourse to any artifice, provided only they could ruin this cause, so much hated, so much dreaded.

This was but the beginning of sorrows, of that reign of persecution which, having its origin in the fury of

Nero, was to land the Church at last in the peace of Constantine. The Jews were successful in stirring up persecution, in exciting the jealousy of the Roman power against the new religion. For three centuries the fires of persecution never ceased to burn. There were times when they slumbered, when they burned less brightly; there were intermittent seasons of repose and relaxation for the Church: but these were a truce rather than a peace—a short suspension of hostilities rather than a definite reconciliation in that long duel between the secular power and Christianity.

We said that martyrdom was a feature distinctive of the new religion; and in saying so we are not forgetting the many noble and almost voluntary deaths undergone by noble men in former ages, because of their virtues unjustly persecuted. We are not forgetting the noble end of Socrates, shamefully put to death by his jealous and fickle countrymen because of the superior tone of his character and teaching. Yet his death bears the aspect rather of an unjust sentence against the innocent than of one wrongfully put to death because of his testimony to some distinct cause or principle. In the genuine martyr three qualities must be found united—sanctity, truth, and suffering. These distinguish him on the one hand from the philosopher, who merely holds certain opinions or belongs to a certain school, without being prepared to suffer for his opinions; and on the other, from the fanatic, who courts persecution on account of some crotchet of his own. Humility is ever a mark of the genuine martyr. Suffering and persecution find him; he does not go forward wilfully to meet them. He waits God's time, when his sufferings shall be profitable for the advancement of God's truth. He does not precipitate himself upon a voluntary doom. Again, certainty—

or at least certitude—of the truth is a mark of the genuine martyr; his suffering is at least evidence of the sincerity of his belief. Applying these tests to discriminate the genuine martyr from the pretender, we find they all meet in the first records of Christianity; and in this, again, we find overwhelming proof of its supernatural origin. For the martyr is one who bears witness in the most striking and unequivocal form to the existence of spiritual truths, which are above and beyond all temporal interests and concerns—which have no direct bearing on this world, yet are of overwhelming importance to a moral and spiritual Being—in the strength and conviction of which he lives, to attest his belief in which he is not unwilling to die. Heavenly things are in his eyes so incomparably greater than temporal blessings, that for the former he is willing to sacrifice home with its sweet and seductive joys, culture, ease, good name. He counts not his life dear to him. He is willing to descend into the gloomy portals of death—so awful to other men, so fearful to all in their mystery—so that he may bear witness to that which has been his life and his joy. He is himself, then, evidence of the truth of that for which he is willing to endure so much.

We have said that ere long the clamours and enmity of the Jews against the Christians began to have their due effect upon the Roman authorities. They retreated from their attitude of impartiality or indifference. The combined influences of Jewish hate and pagan ignorance, the jealousy of the priests, the disdain of the philosophers, and the suspicions of the well-to-do classes, began to withdraw them from that position of disdain and of contemptuous toleration with which they had hitherto viewed the religions of the subject races. And yet it was not any deep or far-reaching views of political interest which

moved the first great persecution against the Christians; an accident, as it seemed, determined it. The city of Rome was laid waste by a tremendous fire—a calamity greater than any that had befallen it since the sacking of the city by the Gauls. Of the sixteen quarters into which the city was divided, three only escaped uninjured. A vast population was left in utter destitution, homeless and unsheltered. Loud and terrible was the cry that burst forth from the suffering multitude; and all the more dangerous was the situation, because public report pointed to the emperor himself as the author of this crime. There was no excess of depravity of which Nero might not reasonably be supposed capable; and he who lived in perpetual dread of the people, who amidst all his autocratic power and his tyrannical rule was supported rather by the passive acquiescence of the populace than by any great display of armed force, was constrained to divert the public indignation against himself to those whose isolated mode of life and unsocial habits furnished against them a plausible ground of accusation. The unfortunate Christians were made the scapegoat of Nero's sins, and multitudes of them suffered the most atrocious punishments. The gardens of Nero, where now stand the palace of the Vatican and the Church of St Peter, were the scenes of these cruelties. A festive tone was given to them; mocking was added to torture. Many Christians were not only nailed to crosses, but, dressed in the skins of beasts, were exposed to the attacks of wild animals, or smeared with wax were held up as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night.

Upon this occasion the Church of Rome had its first experience of imperial persecution, had its baptism of blood. Much obscurity surrounds the beginnings of the

Church of Rome. We gain our first knowledge of it only from scattered hints in the New Testament, or from the more uncertain notices of ecclesiastical tradition. We know that it had been founded about nine years after the death of Christ. We know that it had increased considerably in numbers and in influence, although it was composed principally of persons of foreign origin. Intelligent freedmen constituted a large portion of its members. It had adherents and sympathisers in the palace of Cæsar. It had enjoyed, we are credibly informed, the presence and personal teaching of the two great apostles Peter and Paul. The latter had sent to it a letter partly referring to certain controversies that had arisen in it as to the relation between the works of the law and the grace of the Gospel. But the persecution of Nero casts an additional and lurid light upon the state of the early Roman Church. We see the Christians living in considerable numbers in a state of isolation from the pagan community, already distinguished from the Jews, but sharing the hatred and obloquy which in great measure attached to that race. Questions have been raised as to the origin and extent of the persecution directed against the Christians at this time: whether it was confined to Rome, or extended over the whole of Italy; who were the accusers of the Christians, and on what plausible grounds they were selected for attack. We think there is evidence that the persecution was general, and that at this time the martyrology of the Church was enriched with many names; but the latter question will require some preliminary statement to elucidate it.

The stand-point of the Pagan religion was essentially different from that of the Christian. The former was quite unable to enter into the spirit and meaning of the new

religion. To the Roman, Religion and Patriotism were only two sides of the same universal obligation; or rather Religion was a means of animating his patriotic spirit by procuring for his country those advantages and blessings which it seemed the only rational aim of a citizen to procure. The State religion was intended to propitiate the gods, by sacrifices, prayers, and ceremonial to render them favourable to the commonwealth. And as no assent to any long or cumbrous theological system was involved in this compliance with the State worship, as each was allowed to hold in private the opinions which pleased him best on the great subjects of God and Providence as long as he showed an outward deference to the duties of a Roman citizen, as no inquiry was made into his private life and habits, so it was not impossible—it was, in fact, a frequent occurrence in the later days of the republic—that a man should be a regular worshipper of the gods, or even a minister of the religion of which in private he was known to be a mocker or denier. Cicero was a member of the Roman priesthood, Cæsar held the office of chief pontiff of the national religion; yet one of these great men doubted and speculated, while the other openly averred his disbelief in any immortality or future retribution. The members of the Roman priesthood, the pontiffs, the augurs, the haruspices, were selected from the noblest families of the city; their offices were regarded as an appanage of the Roman aristocracy. Religion was looked upon as a valuable cement of the national constitution—a conservative element tending to maintain the national spirit, the old military pride of Rome. To comply outwardly with the required rites was simply a becoming exhibition of patriotic feeling, a concession to usages graceful, or at least innocent, and

hallowed by the traditions of so many hundred years. To rebel against the religion of Rome was as unnatural and unbecoming as it would be to protest against her manners, her dress, even her language. Judge, then, of the surprise and the irritation excited against the new sect when its members refused to conform to or take part in these national usages. But the obstinacy of the Christian in this respect—that perverseness of spirit which singled him out for the dislike of mankind—was a key to what seemed his eccentricities in other respects. With the Roman the true end of his existence was to serve the State, to fulfil all the duties of the citizen, whether in high or humble position, whether in the senate, the forum, or the camp. To accomplish this he married, he had children, he took part in the worship of the gods as beings who were bound in a federal relation to the great object of his worship,—Rome. And as the taint of Idolatry ran throughout the whole of ancient life, as there was no one duty engaged in, scarcely any object or scene of daily existence which did not bear its impress, the citizen was called upon at each step of his career to pay some recognition, more or less marked, to the ever-present powers among which he lived. But the Christian boldly proclaimed that he belonged to no one place or country; that his Fatherland was heaven, his fellow-citizens the whole community of believers spread over the world. He showed no patriotic regard for the interests of Rome; no jealousy for her honour; no pride in the extension of her power. Perhaps he would speak of her, though with bated breath, as the great Babylon, the mother of abominations, the great evil power which hindered the manifestation of the kingdom of God, and would continue to do so until she was removed. Her divinities

he regarded as demons, her badges of empire as temptations to sin, and engaging in her public offices, with their attendant obligations, as an unholy dallying with the evil one. When such a lamentable want of public spirit prevailed, such a misconception of the true ends of existence, nay, such inveterate animosity against established laws and usages, it is plain there could be no compromise, no half-way course between the Roman statesmen and the Christian innovators.

The fears of superstition came in also to add to the apprehensions of the pagan people, and give seeming justification for the severities which were practised towards the unfortunate Christians. If any public calamity occurred, it was in the minds of the ignorant populace immediately connected with some offence given wittingly or unwittingly to the gods. If the omens were unpropitious, if the gods when consulted seemed to return an unfavourable answer, the interpreters of their will were not slow to refer it to some circumstance which for the time had made the worshippers displeasing to the deity. Especially if any event occurred to awaken panic among the ignorant; if there was any unusual or startling event for which the knowledge of the age was unable to account; if a meteor or comet hung in the air; still more, if there was any public calamity, if there was an earthquake or pestilence, if there was famine or destruction of any kind, if the Tiber overflowed its banks, or the Nile delayed to overflow them, the probable cause was immediately sought in some departure from the old rites, some offence given to the tutelary divinities of Rome. The Christians were always selected as the scapegoat. Most of the great persecutions of the Church were coincident with great public calamities. The Neronian persecution

followed upon the burning of ancient Rome, the persecution of Domitian upon the destruction of the Temple of the Capitoline Jupiter, that of Trajan coincided with the earthquake of Antioch, that of Marcus Aurelius with the great pestilence which wasted the empire.

We can understand how it was often the best emperors, or those most jealous of the honour and traditions of Rome, or desirous of a revival of the national religion, who were the most unrelenting persecutors. The voluptuary or adventurer from the East who had come to wear the purple, favoured or tolerated a sect which had its origin in Syria; while the prince of the old Roman stamp, lamenting the decline of antique Roman manners, and affecting a return to the old austerity, bitterly disliked a religion which seemed to him only one of the upstart Eastern superstitions. Domitian in his eccentric zeal for the revival of the Roman ritual, Trajan in his zeal to revive and extend the military power, Marcus Aurelius in his zeal for philosophy, Decius and Diocletian in their desperate efforts to exterminate a rival with which it was impossible to live in concord, represent to us, in varying degrees and with every variety of character, almost all the diverse influences which were arrayed against Christianity.

Another unfavourable influence for the Christians was their connection with Judaism. This was from the first prejudicial, and was soon severed, but it must not be omitted as one of the causes that militated against the early Church. It shared in all the unpopularity which attached to the Jews from the earliest days of the empire, and especially after the fall of Jerusalem. The interest of their enemies was to involve them in the general hatred with which the Jewish name was regarded. But, over and above their Jewish origin and

the mistakes produced by regarding them as a Jewish sect, there were special disadvantages which weighed upon the Christians. The Jews were a little emigrant nation, oddly mixed up with all the nations of the earth, yet holding, under the Roman authority, laws, usages, and immunities of their own, having their own magistrates, holding often the right of citizenship, their rites protected and even patronised by the authorities. In addition, they were not as a rule a proselytising sect: they maintained strenuously their own ritual and usages, but they kept the Gentiles sternly at a distance. The Christians, on the other hand, were people of no one nation exclusively. They were keen and ardent missionaries, finding their way into the recesses of every household, sapping the old religion, seeking to turn men and women away from the old paths.

Add another cause of persecution—the calumnies industriously heaped upon the Christians. These were foolish and reckless in the extreme. They were accused, in addition to many silly and foolish charges, of deliberately slaying infants, of indulging at their secret meetings in unnatural and incestuous unions. The secrecy in which the Christian assemblies were involved seemed to countenance any charges that might be brought against them; yet this secrecy was itself the result of compulsion, not of choice. At first they met in public, in the market-place, the temple, or the Jewish house of prayer—wherever they found an audience and liberty of worship. But when the hand of persecution was heavy upon them, they were forced to retire into private houses or subterranean vaults; and the accounts of these meetings, falsified by malice or by gossip, were evidently widely circulated in the capital, and were a formidable item in the charges brought against them.

These practices, as alleged against the community of Catholic Christians, were utterly false and groundless; but if orthodox writers are to be believed, there were certain practices among heretical sects which afforded grounds for public dislike.

And now we have mentioned the chief reasons which explain, if they do not justify, the violent opposition everywhere raised against the Church. The persecution under Nero was but the prelude to still greater persecutions—the beginning of that gigantic duel between the Empire and the Church, extending over three centuries, in which the Church was at last to triumph through suffering, the Empire to perish through its violence. These persecutions, at first perhaps mere outbursts of popular fury, were soon recognised and sanctioned by the law. Fierce statutes were promulgated against the believers; they were put under the open ban of the empire. And the secular power was right in its instincts and its dislikes. Between it and the new power which had risen up claiming a spiritual authority extending to every act of man, and to his heart and conscience, no reconciliation was possible.

The Empire at this time has been compared to a dull and sleeping giant, at times awakened to a consciousness of coming danger, and dealing random blows against a clever and agile adversary. But an impartial observer would rather say that all the policy and foresight, as well as the power, was on the side of the imperial tyrant, and that he dealt his blows at a weak and hysterical victim.

CHAPTER IV.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOGMA.

ANCIENT paganism, we have said, had no doctrines. It was essentially a national or local *cultus*, intended to secure favour or protection for the nation or the individual. A poetic dream or a patriotic appeal, it made no profession to penetrate into the deep mysteries of existence, to expound any of the problems which from age to age have exercised the human spirit. It left that to philosophy. It was different, however, with Christianity: it professed to be a philosophy; a religious philosophy, it is true, looking always from the divine rather than the human point of views; still it offered a theory as to the existence of God, His nature, His character, His relation to created beings and to the soul of man His living image, and it also professed to give an account of man, his origin, his duties, and his destinies. In the order of things this was inevitable, if Christianity was to be a rational religion, if it was to lay hold of man, not alone on the social or emotional side of his nature, but of his intellect, his conscience, his sense of relationship to One felt to be the Author of his being. Hence we see how much importance the sacred writers attach to correct beliefs, to right thinking; how naturally the simple beliefs of the first Chris-

tians flowed forth and were crystallised into the form of dogma. Scattered throughout the writings of the New Testament we see germs and detached portions of what afterwards were arranged into definite articles of faith; nor can we doubt that many of these writings were composed under the influence of some guiding motive, to correct an error or misapprehension, to refute some growing or threatening heresy, or to elucidate some forgotten or unnoticed aspect of divine truth. Great indeed was the need of this filial care, exercised by the first doctors of the Church towards their spiritual offspring. The net of the Gospel had been let down freely into the sea of the world, but from the first it had brought with it almost as many impure elements as pure. Early had the adversary sown the tares among the pure wheat of Gospel truth. From various motives many had sought admission into the Church; but they had brought with them their old habits, their old ways of thinking, not unfrequently their old prejudices and sins. It was long before the pure stream of Gospel truth could be cleared of this impure admixture; perhaps that process has not been accomplished fully even yet.

From the first two different streams of tendency, two opposite currents of opinion may be traced in the Church. To these respectively the name of the Judaising and the paganising parties may be applied. Utterly opposed as they were in their sympathies and tendencies, they agreed in derogating from the work of Christ; they gave the Gospel in their systems a subordinate place. The Judaising parties were the first in point of time. Their numbers might be small, they were continually declining in importance, but they were a noisy and troublesome faction in the early

Church. We meet with them continually in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of St Paul, stirring up strife among the first disciples, gaining over to their side even some of the Apostles, introducing the element of national preferences and dislikes, insisting on the observance of the letter of the law, and vehemently opposing the admission of the heathen except on the condition of their complying with its requirements. According to them, the Gospel was only an appendix to the law, a supplement to the patriarchal dispensation. Christ was only the last and perhaps the greatest of the prophets who came to fulfil the law, not in the sense of absorbing it in the greater fulness of the Gospel, but of impressing it more firmly upon the hearts and consciences of men. They were Jews first and Christians afterwards. Christianity was only a new sect, a new development of the Jewish system. This party insisted on the necessity of good works and of ceremonial observance for salvation, and by way of the Church led men back again to the synagogue. They certainly were a considerable and noisy faction in the Church of Jerusalem; but the destruction of that city forty years after the crucifixion, the downfall of the national worship, the continually accumulating disasters of the Jewish nation, contributed always to lessen their number and importance, and after lingering for some time under the name of Ebionites as a small and despised faction, they seem to have died out altogether.

The other party were more numerous and dangerous, and left a more lasting impress on the Church. They probably consisted not so much of misguided Christians as of men only half converted to the faith, who under the profession of the Christian still preserved the garb and habits of the philosopher. Their opinions seem to

have been a curious mixture of Eastern superstition and of Christian ideas. According to them, the world was not created or governed by God, but by angels, and these bad angels. Their opposition to the Jewish law went so far as to lead some of them to maintain that the angels had raised up Moses, appointed the rites and institutions of the law, and inspired the prophets. Hence in their view Christ had come, not to expound, to fulfil, to spiritualise the law, but to deliver the world from the dominion of the angels. It was only the natural consequence of this opinion that the flesh was essentially evil, incapable of being purified or employed for any spiritual purpose. There was no resurrection for this corrupt companion of the soul; the resurrection of which the Gospel spoke was accomplished spiritually in baptism. As a natural consequence, it was indifferent how the flesh was employed. To live in continence and purity like the Christian ascetic, or to indulge in debauch and excess like the heathen, were both courses of action equally devoid of any moral quality or significance. Christ could not be clothed, therefore, in this impure embodiment. God had not taken our nature, was not clothed in our humanity; the flesh He had seemed to assume was only a phantom, an illusion. It is evident that these views struck a blow at the root of all Christian doctrine, indeed of all morality. This scheme of opinion, equally with the preceding, laid the axe to the very root of Christianity—the one by denying Christ's humanity, the other His divinity—the one by denying creation, the other redemption—the one by denying the value of all good works, the other by giving them an independent and exclusive value. Hence we easily understand the indignation with which these views were regarded by the Apostles and early

rulers of the Church—the unanimous voice of censure which is directed against them in the sacred writings. There was here a danger springing up in the very centre of Christianity, a danger more to be dreaded than outward hostility, because it was the voice of a traitor inspiring evil counsels in the very citadel of the truth. Had these opinions been allowed to gain the ascendancy, humanly speaking, it would have been the doom of the faithful Church. Souls for a moment led to regard Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, would soon have been turned back by another road to the synagogue, or to the heathen school or temple. The stream of Christian truth, after some windings, would soon have been lost in the ocean of paganism.

But the eye of authority was not slow to mark, or its voice to protest, against these excesses. The errors of those early heretics give us the key to the meaning and tendency of many of the Books of the New Testament. The eye of the Christian teacher charged with the care of souls, full of paternal regard for the simple of the flock, follows these errorists through all the windings of their tortuous career, shows them as the ravening wolves and robbers they really were; detects on the one hand those Judaisers who sought to deprive converts of the liberty they had in Christ, to impose on them the wearisome and fretting bond of the Jewish ceremonial, and on the other hand the still more dangerous men who sought, by subtle reasoning and philosophy (*gnosis*) falsely so called, to turn men aside from the simplicity that was in Christ, tracing them in the natural consequences of their erroneous opinions, their pride, their contention, their love of gain, their love of dominion, their immorality, their prying and meddling disposition, entering into houses and leading captive silly women, to

whom they promised easier terms than the Gospel, an easier remission of their sins.

In order to understand the writings of the Apostles, we must see them often in combat with these heretics, answering their objections, often without naming them, even in language borrowed from themselves. St Paul in particular hastens to counteract the evil of their doctrines by teaching the full truth of which their doctrines were but the travesty. The true *gnosis*, the knowledge of Christ crucified, he opposes to their pretended knowledge; the *pleroma* Jesus Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, he opposes to the multiplied *pleroma* of the heretics. They had sought to degrade Jesus Christ in the scale of being, by placing Him several degrees beneath the Divinity, and by the pretended omnipotence of angels. St Paul places Him at the head of all creation, above all principalities and powers, the First-born of the Father, the brightness of His glory, and the express Image of His person, by whom He made all æons, the ages and powers of this world, the Heir of all things, raised above all angels, inasmuch as they are but His humble messengers and ministering spirits.

We have here the birth of Theology. Heresy has ever been the appointed means in God's providence of bringing out the fullest expression of divine truth. The early Christian teacher would have loved better to muse over these great truths in silence, to revolve them in the loving contemplation of the heart, than to formulate them in words. Words and confessions, even the most clear and perfect, do to a certain extent disfigure and narrow divine truth by the very inadequacy of the human medium of expression. But this necessity was laid upon the Church, if it was to be maintained in

purity or even in existence. If the flock of Christ was to be preserved from the guile of evil men, its rulers and saints must be transformed into doctors. They would have liked better to pursue their great work of evangelisation; but when even the work and life of Jesus Christ were disfigured by false versions, it was necessary that they should present to the faithful the true good news of Christ.

These varieties of individual and local character, which were afterwards to be represented by different schools of theology in the Church, are to be found in the writings of St Paul and St John. St Paul, though Eastern by birth and training, represents to us essentially the Western cast of thought. He is the man of the civilised world, of the modern world, we may say. He claims everywhere his birthright of Roman citizenship; he is at home pleading before the Roman proconsuls Felix, Festus, and Lysias; he is not unacquainted with the heathen classics; he is acquainted with, and sometimes borrows his illustrations from, the usages of the Roman law. The character of his writings, leaving aside metaphysical subtleties and abstract questions of existence, bears that practical aspect with which the Roman law was conversant. It turns on the relation of man to God and to a holy law; the sin of man; the duty of man; the inequality of his needs and of his strength; the action of grace to deliver him from his sin; that is the constant subject of St Paul's teaching. Morality is his theme; duties rather than mysteries, man more than God, the end of existence rather than the essence of things. St John, on the other hand, seems never to come out of that Eastern atmosphere in which he was born; his mind retains to its last days its primitive and mystical character.

Nursed on a soil which had been the birthplace of so many religious systems, in which the theogonies and cosmogonies of the East seemed to take root, at the foot of the Temple of the great Diana of Ephesus, his conceptions bear that vast, grand, and almost indistinct character which separates them widely from the clear and precise ideas of the West. He seems to gaze in an atmosphere, cloudy yet luminous, in which the forms of things are seen gigantic yet indistinct, and only half detached from the mist. He seems to have been present at the beginning of the world, to witness the development of things, to tell us the intimate nature of the Divine Being, the procession of the divine persons, the glories and employments of the other world. He lives in an atmosphere of ecstasy and contemplation; he sees truth by the intuition of the spiritual eye rather than thinks it out; he feels more than he reasons; he grasps spiritual realities rather by an upward flight of love than by any cool mastery of the understanding. Like St Paul, as one has well said, he seems to remain ever in the attitude in which the stroke of grace has found him. He is ever the disciple leaning on the Master's breast, as St Paul is the impatient horseman on the way to Damascus. Scarcely does he come out of his meditative silence; as scarcely does St Paul, during the thirty years of his eventful history, cease from his career of activity. Even persecution scarcely disturbs the apostle of love and the prophet of Patmos; and he falls asleep with the same words upon his lips which had been the theme of his message and the continued burden of his life, "Little children, love one another."

Yet this writer, so large and profound in his views of spiritual truth, so massive in his conceptions, so

penetrated with Christian love, shows himself most keenly sensitive—almost with a feminine jealousy—of the details even of divine truth, and of the honour of his Master. In his old days he becomes a controversialist. His gospel was written to refute the heresy of Corinthus, which had sprung up near Ephesus, where he lived; and all his other writings evince the keenest distrust, amounting to personal dislike, of the heretics springing up on every side, who denied the humanity of Christ, and treated Him as a mere phantom who had only an illusory communion with the joys, the sorrows, and the sympathies of our nature.

Great need was there of this watchful jealousy on the part of the rulers of the Church. On every side heresies were invading it. In the second century ecclesiastical writers counted no fewer than thirty-two of these foolish dreams, philosophical and theological speculations belonging to other times, other countries, other states of society, but which were now seeking to contract an alliance with Christianity, to overlay its purity with worldly and corrupt additions. This was the penalty Christianity was to pay for its success, for its reception, no longer among the poor and simple, but among the refined and educated of the earth. The Gnostics, the general name given to those early heretics, were, we may believe, half-converted sages who sought to form a universal eclecticism, to make of Christianity an odd amalgam with the elements of Jewish, Greek, and Oriental learning.

Church writers of this time distinguish three periods in the development of Church doctrine. The first was that in which Christian doctrines were simply held in trust, received as part of the divine revelations, contemplated with gratitude and awe, not eagerly scrutinised

and canvassed; then came the time in which they were distorted and perverted by heresy; and lastly, the period when in self-defence the Christian teachers were forced to articulate their beliefs, to give logical explanations of them, when, against their own will they were transformed into doctors.

The Christian University of Alexandria was the first fruit of this rationalising movement in the Church. Clement and Origen were its two brightest names. While the earlier Christian teachers had looked with suspicion on all heathen learning and culture as a delusion and a trap to draw them aside into error, the new teachers looked with friendly or tolerant eye on the scattered lights of heathen wisdom as emanations from the Father of Light, who had never been wanting to any of His creatures, who had in a sense inspired those early sages, who had given those flickering lights of knowledge as a foretaste of the great effulgence which was soon to dawn upon them. They indeed pushed their metaphysical speculations, their love of finding points of contact with heathen learning, their allegorising of Scripture, often to a dangerous excess; and if the eyes of authority had not been fixed on these Christian philosophers, warning them of dangers and protesting against the excesses of their speculation, in their hands the whole Christian system might have dissolved away into an airy dream, a revived Platonism, a graceful and touching allegory. But at every moment in which there was danger to the simplicity of Christian truth, there was always an appeal against mere philosophical glosses or explanations, against mere human additions to the Deposit of faith contained in the Church, "those truths which had been surely believed from the beginning."

Philosophical speculation once opened about the person of Christ, this course of inquiry was pursued by successive theologians in a way which threatened danger to the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Tertullian had endeavoured to make the doctrines level, or, at least, accessible to human reasoning, by dwelling on the double meaning of the term Logos or word as applicable both to the inward thought and to that thought as expressed in words. Thought exists in intelligence before it finds expression in words; a moment comes in which it passes into words, and then it goes forth, it proceeds from him who speaks; it is always united to him, for it is always his thought; it is distinct, for it goes forth from him and appears openly. Reasoning in this manner in regard to the relation of Christ the Logos, the Word to the Fountain of Deity, Tertullian endeavoured to explain both the unity of the Divine Nature and the distinction of the Divine Persons. His theory was carried out, enriched, and expanded by the school of Alexandria, and especially by Clement and Origen. According to them, Christ is Logos, that is to say, Thought and Word of God, is Truth Itself, the Essence of Order, Goodness, and Justice. But this Word subsists both in God who thinks and in the world which He has created in His wisdom and in conformity with His thought. The Word of God subsists in the Divine Intelligence as type of all possible wisdom; it is realised in the world as the model and rule of all real creation. In so far as it is the thought of God, it is God Himself, but it is expressed also in finite Intelligence, and in the world which realises itself. Thus it is at once united to God and distinct from God. Origen illustrates this by the example of a house or vessel constructed after a certain type. So all things, he says, have been made

after the type of possible things already manifested in the Divine wisdom. These ideas, which cannot fail to recall the lofty speculations of Plato, have often since been reproduced in the history of Christian thought. They form the central idea of the vision of God of Malebranche; they form the foundation of almost all Christian metaphysics.

Theologians were not slow to push forward in the road of inquiry thus opened up. The path of theological speculation was indeed beset with difficulties. The question of the nature of Christ and of the three persons in the Trinity, was one of the inquiries in which danger lurked on every side. On the one side was the Scylla of denying the diversity of the Divine persons with the view of establishing the unity of God; on the other, the Charybdis of injuring that unity in order to establish the diversity of the Persons. Into the first of these errors the Sabellians fell. According to them the Divinity should be considered as perfectly one, an absolute monad. The three persons are only three different ways of looking at it, or three developments it has assumed. God creating the world is the Father, God saving the world is the Son, God in His relation to the Church and to the faithful soul, is the Spirit; but these three are only names of the same Being, three different relations which He assumes. So energetically was this view combated by Dionysius of Alexandria, that seeking to establish the divinity of the Persons he brought upon himself the suspicion of impugning the identity of Substance. Here first was brought to light the term "Consubstantial," which was destined afterwards to assume so vast importance in the Church.

The other error was adopted by Paul of Samosata,

Bishop of Antioch. A man of worldly or even immoral life, of violent passions, of unbridled ambition, his doctrinal views were no less charged with danger to the purity of the Church. Carrying out the theories which Dionysius was unjustly accused of holding, he so subordinated the Son in nature to the Father as to maintain that Christ was only a man descended from heaven; become God by the sovereign will of the Father. He was condemned by two councils held at Antioch, who yet, while branding his heresy, declined to make use of the unambiguous word "Consubstantial."

Fifty years followed before the condemnation of the errors of Paul and the outbreak of the heresy of Arius, and these were years of quietude in the Church, so far as controversy was concerned. Doubtless the questions of the nature of the Godhead and of the three Persons were eagerly agitated in the schools of Alexandria; and it was this seat of controversy and of metaphysics which was to have the ambiguous honour of giving birth to the new heresy which was for so many years to distract the Church and even to rend it in pieces. Arius, a presbyter of this city, a man respectable in character and attainments, propounded the notion that Christ the Word was inferior to the Father in nature and posterior in the order of Being. He did not, like Paul of Samosata, maintain that He was only a man elevated to the rank of Godhead by the sovereign will of God—he allowed that He was God, one of the persons of the Trinity, that He had made all things and existed before all time; he refused to Him only two attributes, identity with the Father and Eternity. It is difficult often to reach the exact point in a dispute, considered by the controversialists of vital consequence; but it appears that Arius made a distinction, difficult for

us to comprehend, between existing before all time and existing from Eternity. It is evident, too, that amidst all the dexterity of his reasoning, the fence of his words, the ambiguities with which he surrounded himself, the clear instincts of the Church perceived that in reality he made the Son a creature, higher, doubtless, than other creatures, but still only one of them, owing His existence to God Himself, not co-eternal with Him. What was this but a return to the old discarded heathenism? Jesus Christ, according to this view, was only a demigod, a new Prometheus come to revisit the earth, a creature beside or before which men would not be long in placing other creatures, and of according to them too an idolatrous worship. With clear vision Athanasius perceived this, and told the Arians that in reality, like the heathen, they had two worships, one for the God who had created, the other for the creature. It was the want and the weakness of Paganism that it effected a complete divorce between philosophy and religion, between the wisdom of the wise and the piety of the humble. It was by no means incapable of rising to the idea of one God; but this abstraction, this creature of philosophy when contemplated closely became the mere Absolute or Infinite of thought, a mere negative term, vanished in the clouds of Idealism, incapable of affecting a single heart or inspiring a single lofty action. It was at once the excuse and the strength of the popular religions, even amidst their coarseness and evil, that in their rebound from this dreary idealism, they presented to men's view deities of flesh and blood, in some points like ourselves, who could share man's feelings, with whom he could in some sense sympathise. It was the glory of Christianity that it reconciled these two opposite views. The great God,

the Father of heaven and earth, the Infinite and Eternal, the Incomprehensible, clothed with all the attributes with which philosophy has invested Him, was still there; but He had come out from the mysteries of His essence, He had left His solitary Being, He had been revealed in Jesus Christ, in Him He had been known to us, He had indeed been one of us. The same Being who in the depths of His nature was invested with the strength and majesty of Divinity had been manifested in the tenderness, the pity, the grace, the weakness even of our humanity; the same Being who was able to exercise the intellect of the proudest philosopher was able to melt the heart of a poor child or woman. It was the glory of the Fathers of Nicæa that they seized the vital point of the controversy; they saw that in the heresy of Arius was a vital attack upon Christianity. Whatever words of profound respect might be expressed towards the person of the Son, whatever ambiguities might be mixed up with the discussion, across the cloud of subtleties they perceived clearly that Christianity was attacked in that which had been its distinguishing point in the eyes of the heathen and of the world at large.

To settle this important question, and to give peace to the long disturbed Church, a general council of the Christian world was convoked by the Emperor Constantine, to meet at the city of Nicæa in Bithynia. An intense interest attaches to this assembly. It was the first general council of the Christian Church, met under the auspices and by the desire of a Christian Emperor. It was the first really free assembly of the empire which had met for three hundred years, convoked not slavishly to carry out the demands of an imperial master, under the show of free deliber-

ation and the forms of legality, but to deliberate on matters of highest concern to the Christian community with the consent, the approbation, the respect of the ruler of the world. Bishops to the number of about three hundred from all parts of the world gathered in June 325 in the small city of Nicæa. The deliberations of the Council are not very well known to us; no formal records of the meetings have been preserved. It is difficult to arrive at the exact truth amidst the exaggerations of the orthodox writers and the ambiguities of those who were suspected of Arianising tendencies. One thing is evident—that the feeling of the assembly from the beginning was very adverse to Arius. He appeared at the citation of the council, and stated his views with a boldness amounting almost to insolence, which excited the indignation of the assembly. His friends—among whom, notably were the two Eusebius', Bishops respectively of Cesarea and of Nicomedia—alarmed, took measures to shelter him from the consequences of his temerity and to cover his retreat. They drew up a formula which, beneath expressions of profound respect for the Son, in reality evaded the question at issue, kept it unsettled, and would have left the sore ready at any moment to break out afresh in the Church. Eusebius of Cesarea drew out a declaration of faith, in which the Son was styled "the First-born of all creation." This ambiguous expression for a moment deceived the Emperor, but it could not for a moment deceive or be satisfactory to the clear-sighted Athanasius. There was one expression which Eusebius of Nicomedia said he could *not* receive, which seemed to remove ambiguity and to express the views of the Council on every point which was in debate. This was the Greek term Homoousios, equivalent to the Latin Consubstantial, of the same

essence or nature. The Arians and their allies were willing to go great lengths in the way of compromise, but they were not willing to concede this. The word was at once fixed on by the majority of the council as the expression of their judgment; and those who maintained that there was a time when the Son was not, or that He was not before being begotten, or that he was brought out of nothingness, or that He is of another substance or essence than God, were formally banished from the communion of the Church.

The Council at Nice was regarded with intense interest by the society of the time, as well pagan as Christian. All sorts of legends have gathered around it; supernatural and miraculous occurrences are said to have accompanied it. This contemporary opinion of its vast importance will be indorsed by the judgment of history. It forms a crisis, a new era, in the history of the Church and of the world. Here for the first time we have an example of anxious care for the establishment of correct views in matters beyond the range of human experience, and to some extent speculative and metaphysical. We have the usual concomitants of religious interest, heat, vehemence, even intolerance. This must appear a sad and startling occurrence to the thinker accustomed to the airy and passionless speculations of the heathen world, or disinclined to believe that there is any absolute truth beyond the fleeting range of phenomena, much less truth for which it is worth contending. Truth to the speculative thinker of antiquity was a mere plaything, or at least so uncertain that every one was entitled to hold his own opinion without disturbing that of others. The decision of Nicæa was the testimony of the Christian Church to a Truth supersensuous and eternal, beyond the shifting opinion of

men. It was the testimony of a once suffering but now triumphant Church to the truths which had been its strength and solace in times of suffering and trial. The heathen philosopher had been tolerant, because he did not believe in any fixed standard of truth to which he was bound to conform; he was liberal, because he had no deposit of sacred truth of which he was bound to be sparing. The Christian was less liberal of what he regarded as truth, because he felt it was not his own to be liberal with. He was more jealous and even intolerant of errorists, because he was concerned for what he believed to be the honour and glory of God.

CHAPTER V.

ASCETICISM.

By the decisions of the Council of Nicæa the Church had escaped a great danger. A latent enemy had been unmasked, a sore which threatened to breed corruption in the bosom of the Church had been removed. The Arians generally had been of a character alien to that of the Christian community. They had been sophists, men trained in the schools in the fence of words and metaphysical distinctions; men who looked rather to verbal refinements than to the spirit and meaning of Scripture; who would fain have turned the truth of Jesus into a mere mythology or philosophy, a modified paganism. The forces of the enemy routed within the Church, rallied outside of it, and constituted still a formidable adversary. Arianism, discomfited in the first council, and after various fortunes finally condemned in the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381), was cast out of the Church to linger beyond it a bitter and opposing sect, or finding shelter beyond the outskirts of the empire, to become in its barbarian invaders a source of weakness and trouble to Catholicism.

But meanwhile another stream of tendency was revealing itself. Coincident with the rise and development of the dogmatic spirit within the Church, was the

rise and development of the Ascetic spirit. These two tendencies have their origin in two real and natural dispositions of man. He has a desire to know God, to rise above himself to the source of Infinite Being; but this tendency may find satisfaction in two ways, either by reasoning about God, by inquiries as to His nature and attributes, or by retiring within oneself, by ecstasy, mortification, and prayer, striving to rise to the contemplation of God. In other words, the same tendency, whether it take the form of mystery or of dogmatism, will lead men either to discuss God in the philosopher's chair, or by monastic severity to seek to find Him in the recesses of our own being. Equally manifested were these two tendencies at Alexandria in the third century of our era. Men sought either to reason about God in the schools, or to find Him in the desert by a life of austerity and prayer.

There was here but the development in fuller measure of a tendency long latent in the Church. Asceticism, it is well known, is not peculiar to any creed, it has its root in a craving of man's nature which is anterior to all actual creeds or positive religions. Who has not at times felt in his soul a desire for solitude, a longing to escape from the giddy or self-seeking crowd, and to meditate on those things which concern his higher self—these spiritual realities which underlie his being, and which, though forgotten awhile amidst the engagements of life, in the end vindicate their place as all important? The anchorite of India who, with his painful maceration, his rag cast over his loins, his wooden platter in his hands, sustains himself on grass or on roots, presents a picture most repugnant to our ideas. The Cenobites whose institutions are scattered over the vast uplands of Tibet and Tartary, live under

a common rule and present curious analogies to the monasteries of the West. The Essenes, with their community of goods and spirit of active and practical benevolence, inhabiting the shores of the Dead Sea before the beginning of our era; the Therapeutæ more mystical and contemplative, dwelling in the deserts of Egypt some centuries later, all exhibited in systems diverse to one another the universality of this feeling of our nature. In the Christian Church this tendency to a life of seclusion and retreat, for the purpose of cultivating the higher graces of the Christian character or carrying out more fully those counsels of perfection recommended by our Divine Lord, exhibited itself from the beginning. Individuals forsook their own homes and the commerce of men, to be more alone with God and with their own hearts. As yet, however, it was the age of martyrdom. The Church in the energy of her fiery struggle against the opposing forces that closed in around her, had need of the courage and zeal of all her sons and daughters to sustain her in the conflict. The impulse to the new life came from Egypt, the cradle of the most venerable faiths and most solemn and imposing rites of the world, whose religion had always been characterised by a burning zeal and an enthusiasm almost intemperate. Antony appears to us as the first great hermit. Rich, and born of a good Christian family, he had, while a youth of eighteen, heard the words of the Lord, "Go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow me." He took these words literally. He was filled with a burning desire to follow so closely in the steps of his Lord, to be so near to Him in spirit, that no outward hindrances should have power over him. He sold his acres of rich ground for behoof of the poor,

made over his sister to the care of some pious Christian females, and hastened to bury himself in the desert.

He chose the ruins of an old castle for his abode, and here was the scene of his most fearful spiritual combats: alone, given up to the meditations of his own heart, the wild desert around calculated to inspire him only with images of terror, and to heighten the fervour of his spirit, Antony undertook the double task of subduing the natural desires of the flesh, and, by austerity, of becoming fit to draw near acceptably to God. In his retreat he was not unmolested by the terrible powers of evil. Images of surpassing loveliness hovered round the devoted youth, and tried to turn him aside from the life of penitence, renunciation, and devotion to God on which he had entered. Demons of hideous form and unshapely monsters visited his lonely retreat, or with horrid cries molested the silence of the vigil in which his praying spirit was alone with God. Even the sun seemed to rise upon him to put a period to his devotions. "Oh, sun," he said once, when the light had surprised him in the midst of his religious duties, "wherefore dost thou rise already and turn me from contemplating the splendour of the true light?" And yet with this intense earnestness of soul, there was nothing savage or repulsive in the course of solitary devotion he pursued. Antony, even amidst the austerities by which he sought to subdue the rebellious flesh, preserved that humane and kindly temper, that love of the beautiful in nature, which we find to be everywhere a mark of the genuine monk. His retreat, we are told, was a high and rocky mountain, from which welled forth a stream of limpid water, bordered by palms, which afforded an agreeable shade. Antony had planted this pleasant spot with vines and shrubs: there was an

enclosure for fruit-trees and vegetables, and a tank from which the labour of the monk irrigated the garden. He was by no means unsocial or misanthropic in his way of life; to restrain any feeling of spiritual pride, to quicken his sympathy with others like-minded, he made a round of visits to the most distinguished anchorites who already inhabited the desert, striving to imitate the gentleness of one, the constancy in prayer or charity of another, the distinctive excellence of each. At last the life of superhuman exertion and heroic effort after holiness was rewarded with success. His ambition was attained. Antony had reached that subjugation of his passions, that absolute self-control after which saints and philosophers have sighed in every age. The fame of his wonderful conflicts with the powers of evil, and of his spiritual attainments, had gone abroad. Multitudes sought the devoted hermit, to wonder at him or to imitate him. He withdrew further into the desert, but it was only to be followed by the multitudes, to escape whom he had fled into solitude. The faded voluptuaries of the city, who sought after conversion and a higher life, the disappointed seeker after happiness, the ascetic seeking after a model, the wondering philosopher seeking after wisdom in another direction than in the mere questionings of the understanding, came to inquire after the saintly ascetic, who seemed able to point out a new road to happiness and wisdom. Antony knew well how to discriminate between those different classes of inquirers. To the earnest he offered hospitality and attention; with the frivolous he spent whole nights speaking to them about the state of their soul. Though not possessed of stores of worldly wisdom, Antony, as the fruit of his communings with nature and with his own heart, possessed a wisdom of

the heart which enabled him to reach to a solution of questions inaccessible to the mere philosopher. He had grappled in his own way with many of those questions which perplex the most practised intelligence, and he possessed a strong common-sense which told him the limits within which thought is distinctly to be carried on. Many myths and legends have gathered around his memory; but through the veil they have cast upon him, we can still see the man, saintly and mortified, full of zeal for the glory of his Divine Master and the truth He had taught and intrusted to His disciples, severe towards himself, but kindly towards his fellow-men, to the inquirers who came seeking wisdom and instruction, and the penitent and fallen who came seeking pardon and restoration. Occasionally only he left his solitude and visited the city, in times of great peril to the Church and to the truth, and in seasons of persecution, to comfort and strengthen the confessors of the Christian faith. Then so great was the veneration inspired by his virtues, that even the Roman executioner feared to touch him. And in the no less dangerous times, when the purity of Christian truth was assailed by Arianism, he was not wanting to uphold the tradition of the faith. In this latter case he proved himself as the monks of late days always did, a stronghold of orthodoxy. He died at an advanced age, but his system was extended and consolidated by his successor Pacomius, who gave to the religious communities of Egypt a rule—regulations, that is—for their common life and their religious observance.

Here it may be proper to break off for the present the thread of narrative, in order to inquire into the motive which led multitudes to embrace a life seemingly so strange and repugnant to our nature, and to the

active spirit of Christianity as exemplified by its founder. Especially at present such an inquiry may be useful, when a life of seclusion and retirement for religious purposes is condemned and pitied by the world as tame and cowardly, the hiding of a light, the desertion of a post, the withdrawing of an influence, the virtual abdication of our manhood, and of all that makes life worth living. The dreariness and unwholesomeness of such an existence has been eloquently dwelt upon by writers of the Utilitarian and "greatest happiness" school, its unhealthy moping and groping into self, its aimlessness, its barrenness. Fully recognising the existence of those dangers, it might be retorted that a life exclusively devoted to worldly occupation, whether in pursuit of pleasure or of gain, is liable to objections quite as grave. What shall we say of the life of intrigue, of ambition and scrambling after precedence and social position which the fashionable novel so powerfully depicts, the mean devices used in the attainment of ends deemed so valuable, the love of appearance to the neglect of solid and homely happiness; or, on the other hand, the unscrupulous desire to be rich, heedless of the interest and rights of others, the building up of colossal fortunes, sometimes by disgraceful means, often to be bequeathed to imbecile or spendthrift children, features so characteristic of our day?

It has often been alleged that monasticism is a corruption of Christianity. Let us see how far this accusation is true. Different and opposed motives may lead to the same course of action. The Indian fakir, the Mohammedan dervish, the Christian monk, live lives in some respects similar, but it would be difficult to imagine cases in which the governing motives were more entirely at variance. With the Indian ascetic the

governing idea is that of his religious creed, that matter is in itself and essentially an evil; that individual exertion, too, is an evil, something to be got rid of as speedily as possible, as a drop that is lost in the immensity of ocean. But this was far from the idea that inspired the Christian ascetic. No thought of the essential evil of matter moved him; he had not to unlearn the idea that the body in which he dwelt, and through which he held communion with the outward world, was essentially debased, for he read that in the beginning God created all things very good; that all things around bore the impress of His power and goodness; that the body of man was a temple of the Holy Ghost, set aside and sanctified to holy uses; that the seat of corruption and evil lay in the mind and heart. The true monk believed that civil society and the domestic institutions, public life and marriage, were good and an ordinance of God, might be devoted to the service of God and holiness. But besides and above this natural order, he believed there was a supernatural order, a divine Master and country, which had a stronger claim upon his obedience than any earthly lord or country,—a union of the soul with God, higher and holier than any earthly tie; a life of holiness and peace and devotion more worthy than any which the most enlightened patriotism could suggest. To attain this was the object of his intense desire. He strained after it with the same enthusiasm which the sage or patriot had shown in behalf of his country, or what he might think was the truth. Doubtless, like them, he was often disappointed in the object of his quest; he found the way of perfection too high or narrow or difficult of access; but we might as well deny that there is any true patriotism or attainable truth as any standard of Chris-

tian perfection, because men have been misled in the pursuit of all these. Certain words were always recurring to the genuine monk about the narrow way, and the few who sought or gained admittance to it; or the competition of the Grecian games came aptly to his mind, in which few were so fortunate as to be adorned with the crown of laurels. And thus all life was presented to him under the aspect of a striving for something higher, a severe discipline needful for one who would attain spiritual proficiency. He did not more than other men love suffering and privation, cold, fasting, and poverty for their own sake, but as means by which he was to obtain dominion over the flesh, and rise to liberty of spirit. Above all, his constant aim was to secure his personal salvation. We shall misunderstand the true aim of the monastic calling if we do not give this consideration a foremost place. Whatever other motives may have led men to assume a life of monastic seclusion, whatever collateral advantages may have flowed from it in the preservation of ancient literature, agriculture, learning, and the like, this was the thought ever foremost and prevailing with the true monk, that he was thereby working out his own salvation. Even in days like the present, when this may be condemned as a mercenary consideration, an attempt to gain future blessedness at the expense of present pain, a regard to the truth constrains us not to forego this, to many so damaging a confession. The founders of monastic orders have sometimes been credited with far-reaching political sagacity, with foresight to perceive that by their means the valuable remains of antiquity would be preserved from destruction, the world saved from the tide of barbarism, and the civilisation of the future constructed on a new model. But nothing in the

language which has been preserved to us, or in the character of the first founders of monastic institutions, justifies us in attributing to them so comprehensive designs. They were simple, conscientious men, who, in obedience to what they deemed to be the commands of God's word and the suggestion of His Spirit, withdrew into solitude that more entirely they might consecrate themselves to God. Their life has often been represented as one wanting in the sweet charities of home, cold, gloomy, monotonous, useless, if not a criminal withdrawal from the duties and obligations of life. Yet, if we may judge from the letters and other productions these solitaries have left us in the best times of their system, nowhere do we discover a spirit more light-hearted, tender, even gay, and at the same time more manly and vigorous, than in those who are accused of having condemned themselves to moral nonentity, to an extinction of all the higher aims and uses of existence. And this, be it observed, in exact proportion to the rigour of the discipline to which they subjected themselves. None of that acrid misanthropy, that sour and gloomy moping over imagined grievances, that over-sensitiveness to personal comforts or conveniences, which is so often to be met with in the disappointed man of the world, the spoiled child of ease or fortune, the morbid and irritable man of letters. Instead a free joyousness of spirit, a want of reserve, a self-surrender, which belongs only to the Christian warrior or pilgrim, who has generously given up earthly good that more entirely he may devote himself to the service of his Captain and Lord. We need not hesitate to acknowledge it, those dwellers in the desert, in the lonely and retired monastic house, had a joy pure and strong springing up within the soul—the joy of a good con-

science, of victory over sin, a joy ever fresh and renewed, fed from the eternal source of joy and peace.

For, as we before remarked, they attempted only to carry out to the letter obligations which are incumbent in their measure upon all Christians. Christ had said, "Blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:" and their hearts were set on obtaining this blessedness. Christ had told His first disciples to sell all that they had and to follow Him, and they took these words, not in a mere paraphrase, but in the severe literalness with which they were spoken. Christ had assured His disciples that it was better to minister than to be ministered unto, to be the servant of all for the Gospel's sake; and they began to find that the best secret of a life, free from anxiety and from sin, from self-will and spiritual pride, was a life of community and brotherhood, exchanging their experiences, confessing their sins one to another, being in subordination under one lawfully constituted head. They lived this life because they recognised as a living and ever-present reality what other men talk about, the preciousness of their souls, the dignity of their nature, the greatness of the immortality to come. Hence their theory of life was quite opposed to the Materialism of the present day. They vindicated as no men had ever so nobly done before the freedom of the will, the dignity and independence of man; they showed by their lives that man was not a mere crank or wheel in the vast machinery of nature, the creature of his surroundings, the slave of his destiny; but that he was able to impress his own will upon his surroundings, to mould them in obedience to him. Hence they attained in a measure unknown before that freedom of the wise

man of which the heathen sage had only talked or dreamed.

It is not our purpose to enter into a panegyric of the monastic system, any more than a defence against the accusations which have been made against it, but we cannot pass on without noticing the singular beauty of some of the writings which emanate from the cloister. There is perhaps no more attractive page in the whole range of our Christian literature than those simple and touching compositions, in which the writers breathe forth the unseen struggles of their soul, their intense aspiration after God, or the tenderness which dwelt in their hearts towards one another. We repeat there is no class of literature which seems to breathe more the atmosphere of heaven and the very flower and perfume of Christian charity than those works, many of them by authors unknown, of which the 'Imitation' may be considered as the type and masterpiece.[1]

The monastic movement once begun in Egypt, even its main features speedily underwent a change. The hermit disappeared before the Cenobite; the anchorite's cell was replaced by the monastery. Even under the burning sun, and amidst the dreary wastes of the desert, which seem to favour only a life of contemplation and of inactivity, that devotion to active pursuits appeared which was afterwards so honourably characteristic of the fraternities of the West. The monks of Egypt not only plaited mats and baskets, and cultivated gardens, they had among them smiths, carpenters, and shipbuilders. Athanasius, who had long known

[1] See passages taken from those familiar epistles, which the various communities were in the habit of sending to one another. Montalembert's 'Monks of the West,' English Trans., vol. i. p. 78; and from Anselm, pp. 79, 80.

and admired the holy Antony, whose life he writes, was the means of spreading his beloved institution in the West. During his banishment at the hands of Constantine, he introduced the system into Treves and other seats of the imperial power. It speedily spread, and was popularised in the world of the West. Jerome at Rome was the special advocate and promoter of these religious establishments. The system speedily found favour and support, especially among the female portion of the Roman aristocracy; and the strange sight was beheld of these delicate and luxurious women, the descendants of the Fabii and Æmilii, who lately could scarcely alight on the ground or go abroad except in litters or supported by slaves, urged by the eloquence of the great Roman doctor, undertaking long and painful journeys by sea to the places consecrated by the life and death of their Saviour, and in penance and austerity spending there their remaining days. The great doctors and bishops of the Church, alike in the East and the West, warmly favoured the monastic movement. Ambrose at Milan was its patron. Augustine in Africa supported it, and himself lived with his clergy in a sort of monastic community. In the East, the great names of Chrysostom and Basil were found among those who either were themselves monks or were earnest advocates of the institution. Many of the most able and devoted bishops of the Church were translated from monastic life to the duties of the Episcopate. The calmness and repose of mind, the ascetic zeal, perhaps the concentration and energy of character already displayed in the cloister, formed a good preparation for the difficulties, the trials, the opposition of the more exalted office. As yet, however, if we except the imperfect rules of Pacomius and

Basil, there was no common rule for holding these communities together.

The monastic system at this stage of its existence was invaded with great disorders, or even was threatened with premature dissolution. Bands of pretended monks, making their profession a cloak for indolence and mendicancy, and by the excesses and irregularities of their lives, causing scandal to the faithful, wandered to and fro. The monastic establishments were in danger of breaking up into a number of isolated and discordant institutions, each with its own rules and economy, each with its own jealousies and interests. The withdrawal at this period of the monastic system from the elements of public life would have been an occurrence fraught with disaster to the future of civilisation and of humanity. Humanly speaking, it is impossible to see how, in the absence of monasticism, the future of society could have been assured; but this danger was, in the providence of God, averted by the appearance of Benedict, a man of noble Roman origin, who gave to the monastic system precisely that uniformity and regularity which had hitherto been wanting to it. He founded the famous and noble monastery of Monte Cassino, not far from the retreats where first he had entered on his ascetic career, combated and overthrew the remains of the paganism which even in the sixth and seventh centuries still lingered in remote parts of Italy, and trained missionaries who from that centre were to go forth, bearing the seed of the Gospel, to enrich and fertilise distant lands. One of his disciples, St Maur, became the Apostle of Gaul, and carried thither the institutions of his master; yet the conversion of Gaul and the consolidation of its monastic institutions were due not so much to him as to a crowd of Irish monks and mission-

aries, who, under the guidance of Columban, established a flourishing monastery at Luxeuil in the country of the Vosges, whose offshoots penetrated to almost all the other parts of Gaul, and even passing the Alps, were represented in Lombardy by the famous monastery of Bobbio. Columban, like others of his race, was a man of much independence of character; his adventurous daring led him often into positions of danger and trouble, while his uncompromising assertion of his own views in matters of slight importance led him frequently into antagonism to the bishops of his adopted country, or even to the supreme authorities at Rome. His rule was marked by the same local and national peculiarities; it was unsystematic, but rigorous and unbending to a degree beyond what the weakness of human nature could endure. It remained for some time in existence as a monument of the genius of its author, his fiery zeal, his dauntless temperament, which bore him triumphantly over difficulties which would have crushed weaker men, and it was well suited to make an impression on those barbarous times; but it was never adopted by the authorities of the Church, and eventually it was merged in the milder, more judicious, and liberal rule of Benedict.

And now, recognising the enormous importance of the monastic movement at that particular stage of society in which it arose, and the incalculable blessings it conferred on civilisation, let us try to state, as briefly as possible, a few of the leading results which this decried system, so opposed to the habits of our modern life, gave rise to, as well as some of the objections which may be urged against it. Let us not omit at the outset the great benefit which by modern sociologists will be deemed paramount, that it saved society at a time when no

other influence was sufficient to save it. It came a regenerating agency at that most painful and critical period when the old civilisation, corrupt at heart, and stricken with mortal disease, was lingering in the agonies of dissolution, while the new civilisation was not yet born. To replace the one by the other, to fill up the interval which separated them, was the great task to which the monks, along with the barbarians, were called. We say along with the barbarians; for without the irruption of the Germanic tribes—whom the Romans in their haughty ignorance styled barbarians—spreading like a tide over the empire, fiercelessly and ruthlessly it is true, but leaving behind everywhere fertilising germs, even the genius and daring zeal of these true soldiers of Christ would scarcely have been able to accomplish the miracle of saving that effete mass of corruption which was called the empire. But without the monks the barbarians would have sunk hopelessly into its nameless horrors and abominable sins. In many cases they were already beginning to do so. Roman society was hopelessly evil, and not even the nominal profession of Christianity was able to remove the deadly taint of paganism which pervaded its ideas and its social life. The purifying tide must come from two quarters, from a natural and from a supernatural source.

Tracing this crowning achievement of monasticism into details, let us look at some of the services which at this critical season it rendered to humanity.

I. The monasteries have preserved to us through dark ages the remains of ancient classic literature. By their care in preserving, and their industry and skill in transcribing these precious remains, the monks have laid us under a debt which can never be overestimated. Often, too, they were diligent students, and adepts in

that classical literature which they have preserved. By the side of Scriptural quotations are often to be found in monkish writers quotations from Livy, Virgil, and Seneca, showing how familiar they were with these authors.

II. It follows from this that they were centres of light and refinement in very dark and troubled times. Whatever refinement and civilisation survived the tide of barbarism, was to be found in cloistral life. Outside the walls of those tranquil abodes was a dark surging sea of disorder, passion, and ignorance; within was peace and knowledge. The gentle, the refined, and the timid, who were ill fitted to contend with the rough world in the midst of which they lived, found within the gates of the monasteries a welcome and permanent shelter. Here they found the only schools and universities the times afforded. The feeble lights of learning that remained unextinguished were concentrated in them.

III. They were almost the only secure abodes of purity and morality. Society under the late Roman and early barbarian rule was hopelessly disordered and corrupt. The old world passing away bequeathed the leaven of its evil practices and beliefs to the new world which was forming at its side. Christian life and practice, withdrawing from a hopeless struggle with evil over the wide range of public life, burned with intense brightness in the monastery.

IV. As far as the influence of the monastic institution went, it softened and humanised the manners of the times. Although the founders and rulers of those institutions were often men of gentle birth, yet the peasant and the slave were admitted on a footing of equality. Men of noblest birth submitted to

the lowliest drudgery. Here was an intensely peaceful and democratic institution flourishing in the midst of an intensely aristocratic and predatory society. A lesson was perpetually being given to the turbulent kings and nobles of the time, as they came within hearing of the chime of bells or the voice of praise floating from those peaceful walls, that there was something higher than brute force, nobler than oppression of the weak, telling them by a quiet yet often effectual admonition of the sin of those lives of feud and of oppression which they habitually lived. Those founders of the monastic life sternly rebuked the injustice and sins of rulers. In the interference of the Abbot Aredius to mitigate the oppressive burdens imposed on their subjects by the Merovingian princes, in the long struggle of Columban against the cruelty and impurity of Brunehaut and Thierry II., we have proof how little considerations of rank or fear of consequences were able to move the monks when they were called to the discharge of duty. A beautiful instance of their humanity and gentleness is to be found in the care and protection which they extended to the lower animals, and the familiar intercourse in which they lived with them, as exemplified in the numerous fine and touching legends handed down to us. It seemed as if the old intercourse between man and the lower creatures, and his dominion over them interrupted by sin, were restored in what seemed almost a new garden of innocence.

V. Think of their boundless hospitality. This was one of the foremost duties enjoined on the monks, and it was one which, even in their declining days, was carefully attended to. The monastery, situated in a secluded spot, or on some of the great routes at a time when communications were difficult or dangerous, was a

hospice in which the weary and famishing traveller was welcomed in a room set apart for the purpose, and the unremitting care and attention of Christian charity bestowed upon him. With those who at the end of a toilsome day's journey have found lodgings only in a cold and solitary inn, or encountered a shapeless and untenanted mass of ruins, this consideration ought to have some weight.

VI. By their manual toils monks consecrated labour, so lightly esteemed in a military and aristocratic society. They were the genuine precursors of the working men of to-day. Think of those dense and sombre forests girding what are now the fairest and most fertile parts of Europe, from Northern Gaul and from the Elbe and Weser reaching to and including Switzerland, trackless and uninhabited save by bands of robbers or by wolves and beasts of chase—from the mountains and uplands of the interior extending to the banks of the great rivers, where alone some cultivated spots were to be found, and imparting to the climate of Central Europe a rigour now unknown. All these were in time to be reclaimed by the patient industry of these men of peace and prayer. After the wild waves of barbarian invasion, culminating in the Frankish monarchy, had in turn swept over Gaul and upturned its Roman civilisation, it was monks who were again to restore its faded glories, its flourishing civilisation, to reclaim what was now a dense mass of copse, separated by swamps and morasses into swelling pastures and meadows.

VII. Think of their jealous defence of orthodoxy. In times of terrible danger to the Christian faith, the monks were ever steady and warm supporters of ancient and sound doctrine. Leaving for a time their

retreats and their prayers, they appeared in the crowded cities of Egypt to support the wavering spirits of the orthodox, to confront even rulers and officials when they seemed unfaithful to the interests of truth. In times of laxity in morals or discipline within the orthodox pale, their earnest zeal and impassioned devotion often stirred up the bishops and secular clergy to emulate them by a more earnest discharge of duty.

Lastly. Think of their wonderful missionary zeal and success. Everywhere they were the earnest and indefatigable pioneers of the Gospel. The wild desert, the tangled forest, which by their hands they reclaimed, was a type of the still harsher moral wilderness which was to yield to the persevering efforts of their faith, charity, and industry. Britain was converted by Augustine and those bands of monks whom Gregory had sent forth from Rome on this new conquering expedition; Gaul by Maur, disciple of Benedict; Germany by Boniface. And then when the work was almost to be done over again; when these countries, overrun by Alemanni, Saxons, Slavs, had to be reconverted, Columban and his intrepid throng of Irish missionaries came forth, struggled against the disasters of the Frankish monarchy, and restored to those fierce but still manly and uncorrupt races the light of Christian truth. St Gall, the disciple of Columban, was the apostle of Switzerland; St Adalbert converted the Huns and Slavs, still fresh from their conquests. At a later period we have the same victory virtually repeated. Columban and his band of monks, issuing from Ireland and from his shrine in the little desert Isle of Iona, shed forth the light which was to illuminate the wild Picts and Scots of the North. His institutions, vigorous and hardy, though tinged perhaps too much with the spirit of individuality

and independence, spread everywhere throughout the northern regions of Britain; and transferring their seat from Iona in the west to Lindisfarne in the east, became a centre of light to the Northumbrian kingdom. The complete victory of the Saxons over the Romanised Britons had seemed a defeat of Christianity—a success achieved by the old gods of paganism. But a few years pass, and we behold these wild and ferocious tribes, whom we look back upon as our ancestors, become the willing and grateful subjects of the Cross. There is perhaps no more beautiful and touching incident in history than the sight of those savage worshippers of Thor and Odin listening reverently to the teaching of the gentle monks of Columba, nor any more pleasing spectacle than the stalwart and warlike kings of Northumbria, subdued as by magic to the gentleness and purity of Christianity, accompanying the missionaries of the new faith as their humble interpreters and inducing their subjects to listen; and practical result of this conversion to Christian truth, the peace and welfare of their kingdoms.

Such, briefly sketched, are some of the services rendered to humanity by the monastic orders; and mentioning these, we have merely admitted their claims to be the chief or almost exclusive Institutions of Light and Civilisation in a period signally destitute of these. As countervailing disadvantages, what is there to allege?

One ever-repeated objection is, that this system withdrew many, and often the best individuals, from the active duties of life, and thus removed a health-giving element, and hastened the downfall of a society which was abandoned to its evil impulses. But in a society so hopelessly corrupt and so despairing, in a political

system where favouritism and venality ruled supreme, where every access to merit was closed except through the caprices of the prince, it was doubtless felt by many that higher service to their fellows could be rendered by withdrawing from a hopeless struggle than by maintaining it. There are times when it is true wisdom and true courage to seek a retreat rather than to lead a forlorn-hope. The story of the two officers of the Imperial court at Treves, who, entering a monastery and lifting up a volume containing the life of St Antony, at once resolved upon a life of seclusion, is but a type of many in that unhappy and despairing age, as their cry was doubtless but the echo of that of multitudes—"Where does all our toil lead us? What hope have we except that of becoming the friends of the emperor? It is our main duty to become the friends of God, and from to-day."

The old Roman religion had denied the rights of God and of the individual soul. The sole virtue it extolled was civic virtue; its one duty, patriotism. Man, in its view, had access to the gods only in virtue of his federal relation to the State of which they were the protectors. Yet the patriotism of the Roman was of a narrow and selfish, as it was of an exaggerated, character. With the Roman patrician it meant the right of the sovereign people to lord it over the subject-races of the earth; for himself, the right to absorb the chief places of power and of profit, and to exact from the groaning provincial, by cruelty and oppression, the hard-won fruits of his toils. But Christianity told of a wider and closer bond of community which embraced all nations, though the blood of Quirinus did not flow in their veins, of whose members a common faith and hope and love were the only necessary requirements.

It did not say that men, at the bidding of an exaggerated self-importance, calling itself patriotism, was to sacrifice conscience, his sense of justice, and his duty to himself; on the contrary, it sought to reinforce the great duty of man to cultivate his own higher nature, to bring out the best parts of his character, to work out his own salvation. Thus before the light of closer scrutiny vanishes the sophism that monachism was untrue to the interests of mankind, because it did not bid man sacrifice the highest and purest fruits of his being to a hollow and insincere public life.

Again, monachism has been accused of an habitual tendency to falsehood, of a neglect of the duty of truthfulness, because of the exaggerations and legends, the accounts of miracles, the romantic occurrences with which its chronicles and lives of saints are embellished. In an uncritical age no doubt the duty of exact and literal reproduction of fact was less realised than at present; things are expressed through a poetic or idealised medium which often expresses the meaning better than the dry exactness of the chronicler, and petty and ungenerous would be the criticism which would carp at those touching and beautiful legends which often do credit to human nature. We are at a loss, indeed, sometimes to separate what is intended for history from what is meant as symbolism. When we are told of the wonderful conquests of the Gospel over external nature, how it held spell-bound in obedience to its gentle bidding the most savage animals, we seem to read in parable of the wonderful power the new-born faith in Christ exerted over the rudest natures; how the conquering barbarian became speedily the willing captive and subject of the Cross; and how this same power, exerted over outward nature, led to the overcoming of obstacles, the reclaim-

ing of barren wastes, the conquering of the earth again by the sweat of man's brow, as a new paradise devoted to God. Taking then all the points of the case into consideration, Monasticism appears one of the most beneficent institutions which Providence has made to appear in its season in the history of humanity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVERTED EMPIRE.

To the simple minds of the first Christians the idea that the Roman power should ever be converted to Christianity and become an instrument in propagating it, would have seemed an absurdity. Notwithstanding certain passages occurring in the Holy Scriptures showing that the kingdoms of this world should become the kingdoms of Christ, that kings should be nursing fathers to the Church, it would have seemed to them the wildest of delusions to suppose that a being so steeped in cruelty, vice, and antagonism to the cause of truth as the Roman emperor should ever become its protector, its ally, nay, its obedient child. Yet towards this consummation all events were tending. Earnestness, strength, vigour of moral life, were fast departing from that great unwieldy structure called the Roman Empire, and were concentrating themselves in a society hated, despised, in part invisible, small in comparison, yet extending its ramifications on all sides, which, in compactness, in intelligence, in clearness of purpose, in vigour of execution, was far superior to the Roman power. The population of the Empire might be regarded roughly as composed of two classes: on the one hand, the learned and wealthy, the official and patrician caste, engrossing the

offices and emoluments of State and of religion, hating all innovation, adhering keenly to the traditions of ancient Rome, because in virtue of these they believed the greatness of the State had been achieved; and on the other hand, the populace, plunged in superstition and in vice, living a dull objectless existence, or a sullen discontented one, under the sway of masters who by turns oppressed or pampered them.

The vigorous mind of Constantine saw that some change was inevitable. The Christians were becoming every day more popular. During the latest persecution under Diocletian, the populace often sided with them, and exclaimed loudly against the cruelty of their oppressors. The motives that were likely to influence a character like Constantine, must indeed have been very mingled; motives of State policy must have been powerful; but along with these there is no reason to doubt he had a strong conviction of the truth of Christianity, an almost overpowering awe and reverence in the presence of that mysterious power which in its weakness and obscurity had been able to overcome the strong visible and material forces which were arrayed against it. The impartial historian cannot reasonably doubt the sincerity of the conversion of Constantine; but whatever motives may have influenced him in his change, and in however small a degree he imbibed the spirit of Christianity, even whilst he embraced its outward forms, it is undeniable that a vast improvement was at once effected in the laws and institutions of the Empire. The laws became more austere, as was fitting in a State professing to be governed on Christian principles, while at the same time the penal code was shorn of some of its more cruel and barbarous enactments. The position of women was at once elevated, and attacks on

female virtue were punished with extreme severity. The condition of the vast slave population was ameliorated, as the first step towards their complete emancipation. In the prevailing temper of the Roman populace it must have appeared dangerous and impracticable to abolish at once the gladiatorial contests; but restrictions were placed upon them; they were officially discouraged, as well as placed under the ban of an enlightened public opinion. Freedom of worship was proclaimed to all; the ceremonies of paganism were still tolerated. But in practice it was found impossible to maintain this tolerance; the rites of the old religion had in many places become a mere cloak for debauchery, and therefore at the bidding of the sovereign power many of the temples were destroyed, and the priests dispersed or punished as the ministers of immorality.

Yet we must remember that this great work, this peaceful revolution, was the work of a minority. Even should we refuse to admit Gibbon's estimate of the vast disproportion between Christians and heathens, it is evident, from facts stated by contemporaries, and inferences founded upon these, that the ancient worship still counted its adherents by thousands, while Christianity had only its hundreds; that large masses of the population in the great towns, and the bulk of the country population, remained aliens to that religion, their outward admission to which at a later period proved so injurious to its purity. Although the emperors were professedly Christian, the Empire, in its traditions, its ideas, its literature even, was still unconverted. Paganism was slowly dying; but its dissolution was caused, not by stern repression or persecution from without, but by the force of argument, the superior sanctity of the new

religion—above all, by the want of vitality, the inherent feebleness belonging to itself. Polytheism counted scarcely any martyrs in defence of its claims: that would have been contrary to the spirit of a religion which made no pretensions to a monopoly of the truth, and rested indeed rather on poetry and legend than on any well-sustained evidence addressed to the reason.

By successive princes the privileges of Paganism were further curtailed. Under the stern Theodosius the revenues of its temples were alienated, the temples themselves in many places destroyed: but still in Rome its birthplace the old religion obstinately held its ground; and though the temples were closed and the sacrifices forbidden, the associations of the city remained heathen, hundreds of temples and of shrines disputed the supremacy of the Cross, the consuls entering upon office still consulted the diviners, and the pagan population seemed waiting scornfully till this folly of the new religion should pass away.

But this feeble resistance of paganism, the protests of the more eager of its partisans, could not effectually check the tide of Christianity. The statue of Victory in the senate-house at Rome, which had so often witnessed the deliberations of that body during the palmy days of the republic, on which so many generations of consuls had offered sacrifice before proceeding on their career of conquest, was removed by Constantine to the rival capital on the Bosphorus, but had been restored by the piety or superstition of Julian. A decree came forth that it should be dragged from its pedestal and worship of it discontinued. This decree we are told fell like a thunderbolt among the partisans of the old Religion; but a deputation of senators, headed by the eloquent Symmachus, Prefect of Rome, was coldly dis-

missed by the Emperor, on the ground that they did not represent the unanimous voice of the senate. The feeble though eloquent arguments of Symmachus, and the bold and crushing reply of Ambrose on the Christian side, have both been published, and well represent the completeness of the victory which Christianity had achieved over its antagonist. About the same time all the privileges and immunities of the priesthood were swept away. The vestal virgins, whose order was almost coeval with Rome itself, were dismissed from their office. Their scanty numbers, the occasional irregularities and scandals which disgraced their order, formed a subject of mockery to the Christians, who contrasted with them the flourishing communities of those who among themselves had embraced a solitary and virgin life, not from compulsion, not from motives of temporal reward, or with any hope of returning after a period to the world, but as the free and unrestrained choice of their hearts.

The final blow to polytheism came from Honorius in 408, so that eighty years had elapsed from the profession of Christianity by Constantine to the final suppression of paganism. By this edict all the funds reserved for the support of heathen festivals were alienated, and devoted to the more liberal pay of the soldiery. The temples, now useless and deserted, were made over to the imperial officers, and devoted to useful public purposes, and were thus preserved from the destructive zeal of the more fanatical Christians. All heathen festivals and ceremonies were forbidden. All who did not profess the Christian faith were excluded from public offices; but as we find pagans afterwards in offices of high trust under Christian emperors, it is evident that this edict of intolerance was never carried out.

At length came the great crowning blow to the imperial city. Rome, burdened with centuries of glory and of conquest, of cruelty and of licentiousness, was now to fall under the violence of the barbarian invader. Alaric, with his bands of Goths, thundered at the gates of the city; the fire of his encampments was to be seen from the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter. In this emergency, what was the resource of the pagan aristocracy who still constituted the majority of the senate? True to the traditions of heathenism, they still displayed that bloodthirsty and relentless character which seems its attribute, whether it be covered by the rags of the proletariat, or by the robe and the polished exterior of the courtier or the man of letters. The refined and liberal Symmachus had shown his zeal for the expiring religion by burying alive a vestal who had been guilty of a violation of her vow of chastity. At the instigation of the senate, Serena, the widow of Stilicho and niece of the Emperor Theodosius, was strangled because this sacrilegious Christian was guilty of removing the necklace from the image of Cybele. But the patriciate of Rome, though not wanting in the cruelty which had distinguished their ancestors, were wanting in that energy of character which alone at this critical moment would have saved their country. They were sunk in the utmost excesses of corruption, of effeminacy, and of vice. The Etruscan priests were called in to save the city by their spells, but a more effectual resource was the payment of a vast ransom to Alaric. The victorious Goth entered the city; his fury fell upon all classes, heathen and Christian alike. Yet though he spared the lives of the inhabitants, the downfall was complete; the institutions of the city which had lingered on through so many ages of decay were finally

broken up, the halo of glory and majesty that invested it was gone; the fatal news that Rome was captured and destroyed resounded to the ends of the earth, and filled all classes, friends and enemies, believers and unbelievers, alike with horror and with awe. The Roman patricians, driven from those seats of authority and power which they had so long abused and disgraced, were dispersed, and finally absorbed into the rapidly growing Christian body—an element, it is to be feared, of weakness and danger to the Church.

At this awful period Christianity came in an invigorating and purifying, a new creating power. It mitigated the sufferings of the vanquished, it softened the violence of the barbarian, it opened the way for a new and better order of things. It did not break violently with the past, it did not abruptly hasten over the transitional period which marks the change from an old and decaying civilisation to a new; it took up and incorporated with itself the better elements, the measure of truth, goodness, and nobility, which had existed in the older system. Many of the Christian churches in Rome are either built upon the site or formed of the materials of the old heathen temples—only the distribution, the ground-plan, is different; and this is no inapt symbol of the relation of the new religion to the old. It kept out of sight, it failed to build into its system nothing that was noble, humanising, and elevating in the old world. It respected the continuity of things, the evolution of new forms out of old which ought to prevail in the moral as it does in the natural world. Neutral itself, born in a foreign soil to Rome, owing no debt of gratitude to that power which through centuries had oppressed it, yet cherishing towards it no resentment, but borrowing to some extent its traditions, its discipline,

its language, its supreme and universal authority, the Church stood in a proper position to be mediator between the Empire and the barbarian world outside.

Victorious Christianity did not, then, blindly proclaim war against the past; it adopted what in it was good. One strong point in the old religion by which it attached to itself cultured and sensitive minds, was its love of beauty, its festivals, its chaplets, its incense. The bishops and doctors of the Church declared that they had nothing to find fault with in those graceful and touching observances, and directed the missionaries of the new faith to leave the heathen alone in their innocent usages—nay, in due time, after the danger from paganism had passed away, adopted many of these practices into the Christian ritual, purifying them from their heathen associations. To such an extent did this kindly consideration and accommodation to the feelings of the heathen proceed, that the authorities of the Church even permitted that some of the great festivals and commemorations of the Church should be held at those seasons which had been consecrated by venerable usage to the holidays and festivals of the heathen.

Another good point in the heathen religion was the respect it entertained towards the dead, the family worship, the veneration of those ancestors who from their niches in the family hall still seemed to watch over the doings of their descendants, to feel a kindly interest in the fortunes of their families. Christianity consecrated this feeling by the respect and honour it paid to martyrs, passing on to veneration, in time even to invocation.

No less did Christianity in process of time assimilate to itself, exalt to the higher uses of true religion, ancient art. Painting, in spite of the iconoclastic fury which

in the East ravaged the Empire, as the barbarians did the West, was in due time domesticated in the Christian Church, found there its warmest ally, and those sustaining and elevating influences which, after a due development, were to find their loftiest expression in the noble frescoes and mosaics of the middle ages, and in the marvels of more modern Italian art. The stately but cold metres of the flourishing period of Roman poetry were to give place to that Christian hymnology in which we trace almost the beginning of our modern rhymed verse, being themselves probably an adaptation from the songs and melodies of the soldiery, and of the lower classes of the Roman population.

Above all, in the church architecture, which soon became general, we see Christianity desiring to assimilate and adopt to its own purposes what was useful in the past. The heathen temple was altogether unsuited for the purposes of Christian worship and instruction; it was small, and often roofless; but the Roman basilica or hall of justice supplied just such a building as was required. It was frequently of vast proportions, divided longitudinally by parallel lines of columns, often of unequal height, into different avenues, so as to admit of storeys, and of piercing the wall with windows; it had parts running transversely to the body of the building, occupied by the notarii and others engaged in public business; and at the extreme end from the entrance, fronting the central avenue, an Apse or tribunal, rounded off from the general building, approached by steps, on which were seated the judge and his assessors. This form of architecture was adopted by the Christians for the purposes of their worship. The central nave, with its side aisles, was set aside for the general body of worshippers, the men and women being ranged on different

sides; the transept was occupied by the choir and inferior clergy; the apse became the sanctuary set aside for the bishop and officiating clergy.

No less did Christianity make a legitimate and honourable conquest of the art of Eloquence. On this the ancients had set the highest store; to proficiency in it they had awarded the highest honours and emoluments, as indeed the foremost distinction in it had been achieved by some of the greatest names of antiquity. But the eloquence of the heathen was stilted and pedantic, looking to the manner, tones, and attitude of the speaker rather than the substance of what he had to say; often his speech was accompanied by a player on the flute, who was to sustain his modulation on the required pitch. In the system of the Church all was directed to a loftier purpose. The speaker had no longer to deliver a premeditated and formal harangue before a small circle of frivolous or fantastic hearers. His subjects were of the loftiest that could engage human interests—the immortality of the soul, man's duties here, his destiny hereafter. His discourses were delivered often before vast assemblages of eager and passionate hearers hanging on his lips, often testifying to the strength of their feelings by broken exclamations of interest or delight.

If Christianity thus adorned and elevated those arts which were held in the highest esteem by antiquity, no less was its action beneficial in a different direction. It restored to their true and proper dignity classes and occupations which were degraded and despised in antiquity.

Notice first its elevating influence on woman. As has been often observed, their position in antiquity had been one of a despised character. In the Grecian States the

brilliant gifts of mind and person in woman, which should have secured their equality and respect as the companions of men, had led to their dishonour. The type of the respectable classes was the quiet and unnoticed matron engaged in an unremitting round of household tasks, rearing citizens for the State, the housekeeper of her husband, rather than his companion sharing his confidence and affections. Among the Romans much the same sentiment as to the duties and position of women prevailed, only, in keeping with the habitual cruelty and harshness of the Roman character, the position of the feebler sex was still more humiliating. Where the woman was not the mere slave of her husband, the helpless and dependent object of his cruelty or caprice, the utmost privilege she could expect to attain was to be treated as his daughter, a child for life incapable of rising to true dignity or responsibility of character, a plaything to be petted or punished according to the whim of the moment. Such was her condition in the earlier and better days of the Roman State; but in the later and utterly corrupt stages, she became a power for evil, fearfully taking vengeance for the contempt and injustice inflicted on her. The facilities of divorce gave her unbounded opportunities of exchanging the odious servitude of the Roman matron for a life of habitual or professional profligacy; and among the figures that appear prominently in the sad annals of the late republic or of the Empire, none are darker, or play a more sinister part, than the high-born Roman lady set free from any regard to morality, and from those rigorous restrictions which in primitive times had played the part of moral principles,—the shameless Livias, Julias, and Messalinas. In no department of life was the beneficial influence of Christianity more immediately

felt than in this. In the person of the Jewish maid who was privileged to give birth to the Saviour of the world, the highest honour was conferred upon the weaker sex, and an unfailing type presented of the highest moral loveliness, of purity and tenderness, strength and weakness blended, which has never failed in every age to secure a train of followers who have walked in her steps and imbibed her spirit; and one feels what a distinct advance has been made in the amelioration of woman, when, from the abandoned women of the Empire, or the fierce matron of Roman history who, to show her superiority to death, slew herself by dashing her head against a wall, one turns to the Fabiolas, the Paulas, the Marcellas of Christian and monastic times, praying, fasting, visiting the hovels of the poor, founding hospitals, and traversing distant seas that they might establish in foreign lands their institutions of piety and benevolence. Alike by her constancy in suffering and martyrdom, her zeal and devotion in religion, and her unwearied benevolence, woman proved herself everywhere the equal or superior of man; and thus came about that transition from her inferior position in antiquity to the position she now holds as the equal and confidant of her husband.

Turning to the *slave*, we see the influence of Christianity in improving his position. His emancipation was not effected immediately; no edict of manumission was published by the Christian emperors. Yet a great moral influence was at work which was insensibly, through the intermediate stage of serfdom, to lead to the complete deliverance of the slave. No words are sufficient to describe the horrors of the servile condition among the Romans. Cruelties which, if committed now on the lower animals, would be reprehended and pun-

ished by the law, were inflicted daily on the slave unpunished and almost unnoticed. Chained as a watch in the Atrium of the great house, he was subject to the caprice of his master or of his mistress, who at will would plunge pins or broaches into his face, or for the slightest fault or inadvertency would torture or put him to death. Yet pitiable as was the outward and material degradation of the slaves, their moral degradation was still more complete. They were looked upon as an accursed class, abandoned by destiny to their lot; and the necessary result of this fatalistic belief on their part was that, reckless of consequences, they yielded themselves to every vice and crime. At times, indeed, a gleam of humanity, or a sense of interest, would dictate a milder treatment of the slave in the edicts of emperors or writings of philosophers; but these wise enactments and milder views remained a dead letter, never effecting any real mitigation in the lot of the oppressed. It was the interest or caprice of those monsters of cruelty, the earlier Emperors, to raise their freedmen to a lofty position beside them, as the instruments of their pleasure, or the rivals and terror of the haughty aristocracy; but though often flattered and feared, the freedmen were never respected, the stigma of their vile origin still adhered ineffaceably to them. Christianity by its doctrines could alone effect the great marvel of restoring them to the true rank of humanity. Christ, dying the death of a slave, had consecrated their condition and their sufferings; the blood-stained cross was to become the Charter of their moral emancipation. The Gospel, teaching the common blood that flowed in all men under outward inequalities of rank, made it impossible henceforth for a master to treat his slave as a mere chattel or beast of burden; and still more, by introduc-

ing the slave on terms of equality into the Church, by giving him equal rights in the sight of God, by admitting him to the same communion with his master, a blow was struck at the very foundation of slavery. Once admit that a slave has a conscience, a sense of right, or of individual responsibility, that he has a moral nature as others have, a dignity and a respect due to himself, and we concede the principle that slavery is founded not on nature, but in sin; an institution which, for purposes of expediency or of State, it may not be proper at once to abolish, but which is doomed in the eyes of all just and true men. Still more, give the slave a conscience by which he will faithfully serve his master, and the real slavery of the mind—those fetters by which it eats into the soul—are abolished. Christianity was not slow in perceiving and following up these consequences. Slaves henceforth had a right to their family; their life, honour, and repose were protected. They were entitled to rest upon the great holidays of the Church. In the event of their being sold, care was to be taken not to separate families. The work of manumission went on with increasing rapidity; it was considered a pious act on the festivals of the Church, or on auspicious occasions, to release slaves. At the end of the thirteenth century there were in France no slaves to release; the slave passed into the serf, he into the yeoman or small proprietor. Thus was laid the origin of that middle class which is destined so powerfully to influence modern society.

No less did Christianity ennoble the lot of the working man. The free labourer had stood at a fearful disadvantage in a society where all manual labour was assigned to slaves. Although some of the most distinguished statesmen and philosophers of Rome had

realised immense sums by usury, trade was looked upon as mean and contemptible. Small trades and profits were regarded as petty and sordid, extensive trading operations as unjust. In a military and slave-holding State like Rome, the only honourable occupations were war, public life, and letters. Christianity consecrated toil; it gave the first impetus to that industrial spirit which was so happily to replace the military spirit. Its Founder had wrought at His own craft, a carpenter. His first disciples, in accordance with a wise Jewish regulation, had each practised a trade. Paul, in the midst of his apostolic labours, was a tentmaker. It was made a subject of reproach to the first Christians that they were generally labouring men. Honest labour at some trade, however humble, was almost a requisite for discipleship. Manual labour was enforced in the monasteries of Christendom.

Let us now look very briefly at the beneficial influence of Christianity in mitigating suffering.

I. *Its care for the Poor.*—This was considered one of the first duties of the converted Christian. Multitudes in an excess of charity gave up their own possessions for the sake of the poorer members of the community; a special order of officers in the Christian Church were set apart to look to the interests of the poor. This generous readiness to assist extended to the needy and suffering, not only of their own communion, but to all who were brought within their reach. In vain the Emperor Julian tried to stir up the pagans to emulate it. Fabriola and Psammachia, both of noble Roman family, who had embraced monastic life, founded the one an hospital for the sick at Rome, the other an asylum for the poor at Ostia—the first of a series of benevolent institutions

by which Christianity was to be distinguished from the older religions. The Christian town of the middle ages differed profoundly from the city of classic Greece or Rome; in it the central buildings were the cathedral, and the hospital for the relief of the sick and aged, around which were clustered a number of insignificant dwellings. In classical antiquity the temples were small; but the theatres, the baths, the circus, were immense, a characteristic type of the differences between the two periods.

II. *Influence of Christianity on War.*—The first Christians had a Quakerish dislike of war. To such an extent did they carry out this aversion to bloodshed, that any who were engaged in the execution of even a just punishment of death, were considered thereby to have incurred pollution, and were separated from the communion of the Church. They who daily suffered themselves the most atrocious punishments, had an insuperable dislike to being the instruments of pain and punishment to others. But as Christianity extended itself and penetrated among all ranks of the Empire, it was inevitable that this excessive scrupulosity should be modified. Christians, though not without some controversy as to the lawfulness of the proceeding, sought admission into the army and into the other branches of the public service, and the only question was as to their presence at idolatrous rites in honour of the Gods or the Emperor. Yet one of the first acts of a Christian prince was to mitigate the horrors of war. It was the uncontested right of the victor in ancient times to put to death, to torture, to enslave those who, in the struggle of war, had the misfortune to be vanquished. Constantine, whether out of compliment to the religion which he had em-

braced, or from some really conscientious feeling, after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, which decided the fate of the Empire, gave orders to spare the lives of his enemies, and offered rewards for all captives brought in alive.

III. *Gladiatorial Shows suppressed.*—The passion for these was a disease deep seated in all the cities of the Roman Empire. Christianity, even when victorious, was unable at once to suppress this passion; but it gradually modified these exhibitions, and at length suppressed them. This change, let us remember, was the result not of any feelings of humanity or of State interest, but of the direct influence of the Gospel. Constantine, after his conversion, issued some decrees forbidding gladiatorial exhibitions in times of peace, and forbidding men to volunteer as gladiators. Constantius forbade soldiers and servants of the Imperial Court hiring themselves to Lanistæ, or purveyors of gladiators. An edict of Honorius excluded any one who had been a gladiator from being admitted into the service of a senator. These abominable displays had still however continued, tolerated by the weakness or connivance of the Emperor, and supported by the sympathy of the Pagan population, until one of those unexpected incidents in human history, those outbursts of fanaticism which often hurry on great issues or defeat the wisest purposes of statecraft, brought about the final suppression of this relic of paganism. A monk named Telemachus journeyed from the East with the express intention of putting an end to these exhibitions. The crowd were gathered in the arena, the gladiators had stepped forth to the contest, when, regardless of consequences, he cast himself between and sought to separate the combatants. This black-frocked

fanatic was stoned or torn in pieces by the indignant multitude; but the scandal caused by this event led to an edict of Honorius, by which these disgraceful exhibitions were finally suppressed.

IV. *Democratic Spirit encouraged by the Christian Church.*—By its industrial spirit in the midst of a slave-holding oligarchy, by its hatred of war in the midst of a military power, early Christianity stood out in marked contrast to the spirit of its time, and seemed to anticipate the spirit of modern times. By its democratic character it contrasted severely with the despotism and exclusiveness of its own age. This character it displayed not only in the classes from which its adherents were principally drawn, not only in the principles of equality and brotherhood which animated the Christian community, but in the freedom and daring with which Christian bishops and rulers rebuked tyranny and vice even in the highest ranks. In these bold denunciations of sin, even when the offender was a crowned head and lord of the world, we see the workings of a new spirit. It is impossible to conceive the pontiff of Jupiter in the old religion rebuking one of the early Cæsars as Athanasius dared to rebuke Constantine, as Ambrose dared to denounce the great Theodosius, or Chrysostom the shameless Eudoxia.

Yet although Christianity was able in some degree to mitigate the evils of the time and to spread countless blessings around it, it was unable to save the corrupt society amid which it was planted. That was hopelessly corrupt, beyond recall, beyond possibility of restoration. Christianity might save individual souls; it could not save a society which was pagan at heart, which had received the baneful inheritance of centuries of wrong and evil-doing. In spite of the saints who adorned the

annals of the time; in spite of the philosophers who vainly dreamt of recalling the traditions of the past; in spite of the illustrious examples of wisdom, courage, and heroism given by the statesmen and warriors who from time to time were raised up in that effete civilisation, the Empire, after the conversion of its head to Christianity, was doomed, the sceptre was passing swiftly to those legions of barbarians who, amidst all their faults, still preserved two virtues unknown to ancient Rome — the sense of honour in man, and of respect towards women.

We may trace those relentless and unwearied bands, which from the first recorded times of the Roman State had never ceased to pour down upon the West, invading its frontiers, and like a storm dashing against the barriers that resisted them — following, seemingly, a natural law, and urged forward in their progress by still fiercer tribes behind; we may trace them, from their obscure retreats, ascending the Rhine and Danube, where the Roman power had established its greatest military strength, passing the Alps, the Vosges, the Pyrenees, and, as successive waves spent themselves in ever-widening circles, establishing themselves, the Lombards, the Burgundians, the Franks in Gaul, the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Visigoths in Spain, the Vandals in Africa, the vast tide of barbarian invasion reaching even to Phœnicia and Egypt. They brought with them manliness and strength of character, but at the same time an unrestrained ferocity; and in their kings and rulers was often a sensuality which even the influence of Christianity was unable to control. At this terrible time of transition, this birth of a new era, the Gospel was mercifully present to mitigate its miseries, to relieve the afflicted, to redeem the captives, and by

means of its monks and solitaries to lead the conquering barbarian gradually to the foot of the Cross. But still so closely are the past and the present interwoven, so stern is the law of solidarity which binds men and ages together, that into the hopeful future enter the sins and vices of the forgotten past: we cannot dissociate ourselves from our ancestors in mind and spirit, any more than we can help bearing a likeness to those who have begotten us. The old pagan religion and Roman civilisation expiring bequeathed their deadly legacy to the Teutonic kingdoms and the Christian civilisation which were rising in their stead: in religion, divination, witchcraft, astrology; in domestic life, sensuality; in philosophy, the Neoplatonic Theories, which were to be a source of heresy and confusion in the middle ages; in the State, the despotism, the oppression, the miserable fiscal system which had disgraced the Roman empire.

In the East the state of affairs was infinitely worse. The lower Empire presents a picture of imbecility, of corruption, and of vice, which has made it the object of contempt to all succeeding times. The corrupt Roman civilisation, dislodged from the West, reigned supreme in the East, and furnished a picture of what the converted Western empire would have been, had not the tide of barbarian invasion come to fertilise and give it new life. No gleams of genius, few traces of heroism or devotion, come to enliven those gloomy times, which in corruption, in meanness, in despotism, if not in cruelty, rival the darkest ages of Rome; in which religion was made the cloak of hypocrisy, and its ministers the instruments and accomplices of the imperial tyranny and vice; in which slaves and eunuchs, females of the Court and Christian bishops, strove unceasingly together, now in controversy about microscopic points of doctrine,

now in base and miserable Court intrigues. Constantine had set the dangerous example of a crowned head who was also a theologian; and even the weakest and most vicious of the Byzantine princes were not slow to follow in his steps. Perpetually they interfered in matters of Church doctrine and worship, so that in time the ministers of the Eastern Church became the mere slaves and instruments of their despotic will. After Chrysostom, no Eastern bishop dared to raise a voice against the follies and corruptions of the Court, and there was bred incessantly a crowd of heresies, in which melancholy list figured Eutychians, Macedonians, Nestorians. The Eastern clergy, severed from the unity of the Church and from its centre in Rome, which had so often proved a just and dignified court of appeal, sank hopelessly into heresy and schism: the melancholy spectacle was presented of a Christianity entirely orthodox and deeming itself wise in all matters of controversy, yet almost totally divorced from morality or spiritual life; while the populace, given over alike to frivolity and vice and to superstition, contended now over hard points of doctrine regarding the procession of the Holy Ghost, or the Lights of the Transfiguration, and again were divided into bitter factions, often filling the capital with bloodshed, regarding the success of rival charioteers, the drivers in the circus in the blue or the green jacket. In such circumstances, where scarcely a trace of Christian morality or even of natural manliness was left, where century after century of heaven's mercy and forbearance gave no impulse to amendment, but only seemed to leave deeper the impress of folly and crime, a severer doom than that allotted to the West was in store. No merciful tide of barbarians was to pour down upon the East to re-

generate it, even while it seemed to lay it waste: the fatal and destructive forces of Islamism were at hand.

The historian is tempted to draw beforehand a flattering picture of what the Empire, converted to Christ, would be,—a State in which the prince published only just and righteous laws, willingly obeyed by a loyal and God-fearing people; in which brotherly concern for the good of one another should be the predominating feature of its citizens. How miserable a contrast to this do the actual facts of history present! The outward face of society might be changed; its real condition remained much the same. The ruler might be called and profess himself Christian, but among the mass of his subjects the old pagan institutions and traditions prevailed. Christianity, coming down from its lofty position as the religion of a spiritual few, might to some extent soften and ameliorate the outward face of society and save individual souls; the forces opposed to it were too solid to yield before its influence.

CHAPTER VII.

MOHAMMEDANISM.

THERE are periods of human history in which advance seems to be made at a rate quite disproportionate to former progress; the tide within a few years covers as much space as in preceding centuries or millenniums. There are other periods in which progress seems to be at a standstill. But there are others, again, in which, from causes not always obvious or ascertained, there is loss of ground already gained, decay, retrogression to a more elementary and barbaric state of things. In the outward and political history of man, as in the natural history of created beings, there is degeneration as well as progress and ascent. In our historical survey we have now reached a stage in which this tendency is evident in a series of movements—violent, disruptive, breaking in upon the continuity of human affairs, having seemingly little connection with the order of events which preceded it, leaving behind it only ruin and disorder. We refer to the outbreak of Mohammedanism, which can only be considered as a backward movement in the history of our race—a wild volcanic force breaking in upon the steadiness of those operations by which progress is made and human society is built up in orderly sequence. Considering it from all points of

view, its genesis, continuance, and effects upon those races which it has influenced, we shall be forced to take an unfavourable view of this most simple and primitive form of Deism, this seeming return to the earliest *cultus* of the Semitic race, this unadorned and unalloyed natural religion. We shall discern in it a movement of demoniac energy, leaving its malign effects upon the regions which it has traversed; a singular bar to the improvement of mankind, and to those favouring influences by which society is ever being led on to more perfection; a subtle and deadly enemy to the forms of truth and goodness already existing; a scheme calculated with singular skill to frustrate the kind intentions of Providence towards our race. In almost every preceding form of religion we recognise some distinctive features which recommend it to our favourable view. In Buddhism we recognise the lofty moral tone of many of its precepts—the gentleness, the tolerance, the respect for life as a sacred gift from heaven. In Zoroastianism we perceive an intense consciousness of the foulness of sin, and a regard for purity symbolised as light; an effort to solve the great mystery of sin and evil, of the struggle between light and darkness. In the manifold forms of Greek worship we perceive an intense sympathy with the beautiful in humanity, a recognition of the revelation of the Divine in the Beautiful, which blinds us almost to the moral deformity which accompanied it. Even in the State religion of Rome we see many civic virtues, a thoughtful and grateful feeling towards the departed, a sense real though vague of a superintending Providence displeased with evil. In the Ethnic religions of the world, of Scandinavia, of Gaul, and even of China, we discern much pure and noble teaching. But in Mohammedanism, as presented to us in the character

of its founder, in its scriptures, in its historical development, we are unable to discover more than a more or less adroit adaptation, a compilation from various sources, or a political manifesto.

That the social and political face of the world should at this stage of history have been changed by the irruption of half-civilised bands from Arabia, is an event which affects us with surprise. It is an event which the student who does not reflect that the unexpected is often that which occurs in public life is unprepared for. Yet there was at this epoch a combination of circumstances which renders the fact less wonderful than at first sight it seems. Arabia was a vast country teeming with possibilities of greatness, containing on its unexhausted soil numerous tribes, bold, chivalrous, adventurous, endowed by nature with a wonderful and irrepressible vitality. It was not, as has been sometimes asserted, an unconquered country: great regions of it had been subject to a foreign yoke, the Persian and Abyssinian had ruled by turns in Yemen and Bahrein; its north-western frontiers had formed the Roman province of Arabia; many of its tribes had submitted to the rule of the Greek emperor. Still from its isolated position it had long retained its original laws, customs, traditions, in a more unaltered state than any of the countries in the East. Nor were its inhabitants the idolaters they have sometimes been supposed to be. In common with the other Semitic races, they held a pure monotheism; they believed in a God infinitely raised above and separate from His living creatures and His works. But into this pure and primitive creed a number of foreign and superstitious usages had intruded: they held in reverence the heavenly Bodies; they attached an excessive veneration to certain Localities; they had their

tutelary Deities, who, they believed, had power to intercede for them in heaven, and to whom it is probable they offered a more sincere devotion than to the sublime and ideal Being whom they acknowledged as the First Great Cause of all. Above all, they paid a superstitious homage to the black stone of the Caaba, which they alleged had fallen from heaven with Adam, and once white, had become black owing to its tears and its shame at the iniquity of man. The Theology of these wild and untamed races was, we may believe, not very well defined or consistent, and along with this body of primitive tradition they had adopted many beliefs borrowed from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, which they altered in the way most gratifying to their national pride. Thus the well which the Angel of God had opened to the eyes of Hagar when to escape death she fled into the wilderness with Ishmael her son, became the well Zimzem at Mecca; the founding of the city which dated only from the fourth or fifth century A.D., was associated with these ancient personages; the Holy House, the Caaba, had been the work of Abraham and Ishmael. Yet although all these varying elements had been adopted into their religious system, although it was an eclecticism in which Persian and Chaldean, Jew and Christian elements, alike found admission, no character could be further removed from the devout than the Arab of the sixth century. Like his descendant of to-day his religious profession sat lightly upon him; it did not interfere with the practices of his daily life, with his enjoyments or his vices. The Arab is refined, full of jest, fond of contests of eloquence and poetry; he is also prudent, reserved, a lover of adventure and of enterprise, averse by nature to all mysticism or extravagant devotion. In these latter respects he

has been compared to the Englishman of to-day. The inhabitants of Arabia have always consisted of two classes: the Bedouin, the wanderer of the desert, low both intellectually and socially, base, treacherous, almost wanting in the religious sense; and the inhabitants of the towns, who along with an incredible immorality almost universal among the Arabs, exhibit many nobler traits—a dignity, a manliness, a degree of culture, which might qualify them for a higher social condition than they enjoy. Among this latter class in the time of Mohammed a sufficiently advanced culture prevailed. The Arab of those days was distinguished, like the Arab of to-day, for his sociable qualities, his politeness, his humour, his refinement, combined with a natural shrewdness which fits him eminently to be a successful merchant or man of affairs. The pre-Islamite times in Arabia had been the flourishing period of its literature; they had given birth to several poets distinguished for the *verve* and fire of their verses, and for the Anacreontic freedom with which they devoted themselves to the praise of wine and woman. Fairs were held at stated seasons and localities, in which the pursuits of commerce, and perhaps devotion, were varied by oratorical and poetical displays. Rivalry produced among the different tribes a healthy love of competition for honours, and great was the distinction conferred by success in one of these peaceful contests.

The Arabia of the sixth century was also a land of commerce and of considerable wealth, and in the intervals of peace between the perpetual intertribal feuds, mercantile enterprise was carried on with energy.

Two great tracks of commercial activity were traversed at different seasons of the year by large caravans, —the one leading from Yemen to Mecca, the other from

Mecca along the deserts into Syria. Mecca was, even before the time of Mohammed, a town of some wealth and importance, the centre of a large trade, the resort of the tribes for purposes of business and amusement, as well as noted for its historical and religious associations. Nor was the vast peninsula by any means so isolated as to be unaffected by foreign influences. The Jews possessed large and influential colonies, and their rites and traditions had a wide diffusion throughout the land. The Christians, too, owned adherents scattered over the vast territory, and even were presided over by a bishop of their own. In their language, again, the Arabians possessed a vast superiority over the adjoining nations. It was a graceful and forcible instrument of expression, wonderful in its complexity and in its power of delineating minute shades of meaning, admirably adapted for philosophical discussion, in which respects, among the Semitic tongues, it occupies a place similar to the ancient Greek or to the modern German among the branches of the Aryan family.

If optimistic theories were correct, if the world proceeded always on lines of improvement and of progress, if the hand of a superintending Providence were always visible in human affairs, at this stage the kindly influence of Christianity would have appeared among the Arabian tribes, enlightening what in them was dark, correcting what was false and corrupt, healing what was disordered in their national life, becoming everywhere a source of light and unity and civilisation. Instead of this, the sinister presence of Mohammed is seen. To a religious mind it will be impossible to view the permission of this manifestation of evil except as a punishment inflicted upon Christendom of the decay and loss of its

first love and loyalty to Christ, of the endless divisions and barren controversies which were supplanting the life of true religion, of the sinful separation of the East from the West, of the corruption of Byzantine Christianity, and the excessive regard to rites and superstitious observances to the neglect of true holiness. In addition to these the political state of the world at this epoch singularly favoured the spread of a new form of religion. The Roman and Persian Empires, which alone could offer resistance to the inroads of fanaticism, were both exhausted after their long internecine struggle. The numerous heretical and schismatical sects which existed over the length and breadth of the Eastern Empire, regarded their Byzantine master with feelings of detestation, and forgetful of the duties of their common religion, were only too glad to welcome any invader who should deliver them from his yoke. In Egypt especially, which had ever been the birthplace of new and strange worships, Monothelites, Monophysites, Jacobites, and Nestorians maintained a long and bitter contest on subtle and invisible points of metaphysics and theology, agreeing only in an undying hatred of their brethren of the Greek rite, and of the Byzantine ruler who presided over their community. In the midst of this disturbed state of affairs Mohammed appeared, the evil genius of his age, the political Mephistopheles, who with the withering breath of his contempt was to sweep away the cobwebs of controversy and debate which had gathered around the sublime and simple teachings of the Gospel; who, by the keenness of his sword, and the simplicity of his formula of one God, and Mohammed His prophet, was to cut in twain the tangled knot of theological subtleties, and by the wild and fiery independence of his character,

to put to shame and rout the priests and courtiers who had committed their consciences and their honour to the keeping of the Byzantine emperor. The time and the situation lent themselves singularly to this enterprise, and the agent to conduct it appeared. In Mohammed were united the qualities necessary to succeed in such an undertaking: a man of intense self-confidence, passionate in temper, but cool, sagacious, temporising, when the occasion demanded: a schemer first, thoroughly acquainted with the capacities of his countrymen; a fanatic afterwards, commanding in presence, persuasive in his address, gracious to his friends, relentless to enemies, and at all times utterly unscrupulous in his dealings with those who stood in the way of his designs.

So complicated is human nature, so subtle the windings of the human heart, so mingled the motives which influence us in our actions, so unconscious are we ourselves of our real motives, that in a character like Mohammed's, additionally obscured by time and the misrepresentations alike of friend and enemy, it is difficult to decide when he was a sincere fanatic and when a conscious impostor. The elder historians, as Maracci and Prideaux, viewed him in this latter character alone. Later writers have been disposed to the more lenient view, that at first at least he was sincere. Theological and anti-theological considerations have entered into this question. The older writers are supposed to have reviled him because he was anti-Christian; for the same reason Gibbon and others of his school have extolled him. We shall perhaps come to the truest understanding of his character if we view him not as an isolated phenomenon to be judged on abstract considerations only, but view him as one of a class to be met with in human history, as a

typical personage. Like the first Napoleon, he was a man of intense pride and restless ambition, full of vast plans and belief in his own destiny, utterly unscrupulous as to means when his own projects were at stake, and by a process of delusion not uncommon in enthusiasts, confounding opposition to himself with opposition to the Divine will; yet, like Napoleon too, in some sense introducing a better state of things than the chaos and disorder that reigned before, and knowing wonderfully how to adapt himself to the genius of the time and of the people among whom he lived. Like Cromwell, he powerfully took advantage of the religious idea in the furtherance of his designs. He was in his own eyes a missionary and prophet first, a conqueror and ruler afterwards. Perhaps we may cast a still clearer light upon his character by comparing him to another personage of much more modern date. Between the beginning of Mormonism and of Moslemism there are striking parallels. It would indeed be unjust to the inoffensive discoverer of the Book of Mormon to compare him to the cruel and unscrupulous Mohammed in his later days; but the life of each illustrates a curious phase of human history, and shows how movements, obscure and feeble in their beginning, develop into vast consequences beyond the control of the individual will, and surprising by their success those who originated them. Hence the seeming seal of heaven's approval upon the mission, and renewed zeal and energy on the part of those who diffuse it. Like Mohammed, Joseph Smith gives himself out for a prophet, the reformer and restorer of old faiths, gathering in one the scattered lights of former revelations; like him, he forges a revelation. He is at first poor, obscure, persecuted, evil-spoken of. Less fortunate than his brother prophet, he is at this

stage slain by his opponents. But the movement gains fresh life under his successor; the sect increases in number and in vigour, and sends forth its missionaries abroad. By its offers of temporal gain and licensed sensuality it gains many proselytes. Driven forth from its first abode, it migrates to a new territory, where it thrives and prospers; its new chief conducts the affairs of the community with prudence and success. The early disciples of Mormonism were, like the first Mohammedans, remarkable for sobriety, thrift, and energy; even now they are among the most hardy and resolute settlers in the wilds of America, and on account of their marriage practices, so similar to those of the Eastern religion, have even won the praise from a capable authority of holding "the only scientific religion." Had Mormonism made its appearance amidst a weak and disorganised society, and been able to propagate its conquests by the sword, the analogy between the two religions would have been even more complete.

Looking at the known facts of Mohammed's life, it is not easy to form a decided opinion as to the sincerity of his belief in his own mission. As regards his earlier years, previous to his retirement and ecstasy in the cave of Hirah, it is open to debate whether he was even then the conscious impostor or the wild Dreamer of the Desert—the enthusiast of a new faith. Looking at the glaring and deliberate imposture which marked his later career, it is difficult to believe that his whole character altered so suddenly, unless the excess of religious ecstasy and solitary meditation had turned his brain and changed him into the man he afterwards became. At first he appears as the ordinary Arab lad, poor and utterly unlettered, but intelligent, of engaging presence, gaining the goodwill of those with whom he comes in contact.

He conducts a caravan from Arabia into Syria; he acts as factor or agent for the rich widow, Kadijah; he is faithful in that trust, and afterwards marries her. Outwardly at least he is a faithful husband during the long period of their married life. He publishes his claim to be a divine messenger or restorer of the primitive religion, his claims are contemptuously treated by his near kinsmen, there appears not to be depth of conviction or religious feeling in the Arab character sufficient to make it fruitfully receive any religion. But soon Mohammed appears in a new character, the cloak of moderation and forbearance which he assumed is cast aside, no longer the gentle enthusiast, seeking to win men by persuasion, he shows himself the wary and cool tactician, the skilful and arrogant impostor, the unbridled sensualist, the deliberate assassin. Laying his plans with consummate skill and far-reaching aim, by bribes and promises he seeks to win over the tribes who come up on pilgrimage to the yearly fairs of Mecca. The chiefs of Tayif he seeks to enlist on his side by promising them the sovereignty over Mecca. Assailed and baffled in that city, he has a faction of zealous partisans at Medina ready to receive him and to fight for him with their last breath. Towards the Jews he adopts at first a policy of conciliation. Availing himself of, and skilfully adapting Jewish legends, he endeavours to make out that he is the Messiah promised to the fathers. His knowledge of the Jewish or Christian Scriptures seems to have been slender and confused. It is not likely that he had ever seen or read the Christian Scriptures; he knew of them from the same source from which he derived his knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures—from Jews retailing to him the traditions prevalent among the Christians of Syria, from

ignorant Christian Arabs or Christian slaves. Cleverly he endeavours to accommodate the Scriptures to his own designs, to show that he is the Prophet promised to the Jews, the Comforter promised to the Christians. The wild legends and garbled Scripture stories circulated by the Jews appear in his hands as the heavenly version of the Koran. At first the Jewish and Christian Scriptures are recognised as authoritative, the Koran is merely supplementary to them; then it is of equal authority; lastly, for true believers, it supersedes the others altogether.

During the latter years of Mohammed's life, we see a rapid deterioration even from the low standard of morality to which he had formerly laid claim. He had doubtless from the first contemplated, if his pretensions were rejected, war and conquest; his forbearance and moderation were only assumed. But how shall any one justify the infamous treachery and cruelty that marked his later career—his making war during the sacred months, his bloodthirsty conduct towards his prisoners after the skirmish of Bedr, his wholesale assassination of the Jews who had surrendered to him after the pretended judgment of Said, his cruelty to his political opponents, his barbarous punishments, the torture and crucifixion he inflicted upon his enemies? Who shall seek to extenuate his shameless sensuality after he became the ruler of Medina, his exceeding even the limits of that indulgence he had permitted to himself, the scandal occasioned to the not over-sensitive minds of his disciples being met by additional pretended revelations? How shall we accept as a sincere and genuine, even though misguided production of his brain, the Koran, with its vast tissue of extra-

vagances and puerilities, its utter insipidity, its pretended appearances of angels, its manifest adaptation to the political exigencies of the time? In all these respects Mohammed has often been judged by the standard, not of a too severe but a too lenient criticism. The eventual success of his mission has blinded men to the real character of its founder. He has appeared other than the barbarian he really was,—the type of the reckless adventurer and impostor, who is ever appearing on the troubled surface of Eastern life, only achieving a more lasting success than such usually have done. In the character of its founder we see a wonderful type of the character of the system which by its adaptation to human weakness, and especially to the genius and habits of Eastern life, through centuries of barbarism, cruelty, and imposture, has been able to perpetuate itself among half-civilised populations. Nay, over a great portion of the globe still flourishes, in its ancient energy, its haughty intolerance and defiant eagerness and zeal.

Yet this system, ultimately so successful, was marked during the lifetime of Mohammed by no great degree of success—was borne on by no tide of sincere religious enthusiasm. For years after his assumed apostolate, in spite of his diplomacy, his compromise with the so-called idolatry of Mecca, the prophet had gained only forty converts. Those who professed allegiance to him did so often with the most cynical professions on their lips, and after his death his cause was quite abandoned by the wild and wandering tribes of Arabia, and rallied only under the able statesmanship of Abubekr and Omar, and the chivalrous adherence of Ali. A tangible cause of very real enthusiasm was now presented to the

believers in the war of spoliation and conquest they were invited to undertake. The rich and fertile countries which surrounded them, the seats of ancient renown and civilisation, by their degeneracy and their divisions became an easy prey to the invader.

Turning from the character of Mohammed, let us consider the doctrine which the potent argument of the sword was invoked to publish and disseminate. And here our task should be an easy one: no lengthy confession of faith was required of the rude warriors who were the first missionaries of Islam. "There is but one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet," is a formula which presents a charming simplicity of dogma, which must have been welcome to the first disciples of the desert, as it is acceptable to the Deist or Agnostic of our day, who strenuously objects to the complicated formulas, the deductions of theology, to which the professor of belief in one or other of the Christian Churches is supposed to commit himself. Nor will the satisfaction of the Agnostic be diminished when he finds that by the profession of belief in one God which Islamism demands, he is by no means committed to any clear or definite opinion as to the character and attributes of that God. The God of the Koran and of the orthodox Mussulman is by no means the God of the Christian, a gracious and merciful Father, accessible to prayer, forgiving the penitent, interested in human affairs, a superintending Providence, holy Himself, yet seeking to recover men from their unholiness and guilt. No, He is a God without moral attributes, or rather an impersonal and blind fate, a vast unknown force, absorbing all in itself, jealous of every personality, using men as its sport and plaything, for high and eternal

reasons of its own ordaining some to eternal happiness, others to eternal destruction. This conception of a rigorous and inexorable fate which distinguishes Islamism, outstripping even Calvinism in the vigour of its deductions, readily blends itself with the Materialistic or Agnostic conception of a great unknown force or underlying principle of all things, undefinable, without moral or intellectual attributes, the object only of vague emotions of mystery and awe. Hence the Mohammedan religion has been much in favour with freethinkers of every age; and one eminent representative of this school, M. Renan, has not hesitated to give utterance to a prophecy that from the admirable simplicity of its doctrinal system, its freedom from priestly pretensions or mysteries of any kind, it will probably supersede Christianity as the religion of the future. As regards the question of fact, this writer is unquestionably correct. Islamism is quite free from Ecclesiasticism of any kind, it is an extreme and rigorous Puritanism; it has no Priests, but Teachers and Doctors only; no Sacraments, but sermons and expositions take their place; its Mosques are meeting-places for prayer, reading, and interpretation of the Koran; it is devoid of those suggestive and picturesque rites and soothing ceremonies which in other religions are largely invoked to kindle and sustain devout feeling. The bald and dreary Monotheism which constitutes the central and indeed only necessary element of its creed, but which may easily pass into a vague Mysticism or Pantheism, presents no fitting object on which devout thought or meditation can gratefully rest upon.

If we trace the effects of Islamism, in public or

in private life, we shall be forced to an unfavourable judgment. In public life it has led to the crushing of political and social liberty, to the stagnation and decay of the society over which its rule extends. There is in Mohammedan countries no steady upbuilding of societies on the grand principles of constitutional right and liberty, no evolution of order and progress out of stormy periods of contest and strife, no balancing of rival powers and interests such as ensures the stability of societies, of authority on the one hand and of individual right and liberty on the other. The constitution of all Islamite societies is rude, stationary, elementary. Times of spasmodic activity and passing prosperity there may be as some energetic ruler or conquerer for a time possesses the reins of power; but these are of short duration, the chill of reaction succeeds speedily to the fever of excitement. The appeal to the letter of the Koran, as the ultimate authority in all civil and criminal questions, dispenses with the need and the growth of any solid system of jurisprudence, and gives to the most fallacious and arbitrary decisions a quasi-divine sanction. The monarch and his subjects, in lands cursed with Mohammedanism, represent to us, in fact, the relation between the Supreme Being and His creatures, sketched in the Koran, a despot reigning without mercy or justice over a crowd of slaves, rebellious or despairing, at his feet. The history of every Mohammedan dynasty has been truly, if strongly, described as that either of a pig-stye or a slaughter-house. Human nature, injured or repressed, will of course avenge itself in terrible ways; and the fear of sudden acts of vengeance or of revolution has alone acted as a check upon Eastern rulers in their career of rapacity and injustice.

If we look farther at the character of Islamism, we see how it was contrived, with consummate skill, to counteract the progress of Christianity. It was no goodly tree springing from a fertile soil and laden with fruits of blessing to mankind; it bears everywhere the marks of an artificial production, a clever counterfeit or manufacture. In the carrying out of his scheme the prophet sought in every respect to make it the antithesis of Christianity. Christianity had permitted to its followers the moderate use of wine, and had consecrated it in its highest rite; Mohammed absolutely forbade it to his followers. Christianity looked with kindness on the innocent amusements of mankind, and incorporated with itself all that was good in the preceding civilisation; Mohammedanism sternly prohibited all the genial and graceful observances of life, all amusements and festivities unconnected with religion. In the strictness with which it was first published it prohibited, or greatly discouraged, all engaging in seafaring pursuits, all trade and agriculture. By its doctrine of an inexorable fate presiding over human events, as opposed to the Christian view of freewill, it checked that flow of energy by which individuals succeed and societies progress in life,—all originality and invention. It gave rise to the harem, the antithesis to the Christian home. It was actuated by the most frantic jealousy and hatred of Christianity, and this feeling extended even to the minutest injunctions given by the prophet. The Jews and Christians in their worship turned towards Jerusalem; Moslems were henceforth to worship with their faces turned towards Mecca. The Jews used a trumpet, the Christians bells, in summoning people to worship. These were to be discarded in

the new religion; the voice of the muezzin from the minaret-top was alone to proclaim the hours of prayer. Three occupations alone were virtually permitted to the Mussulman—prayer, fighting, and sensuality. The first of these was almost a form of the second. The Moslem prayer breathes a spirit of eager defiance and fiery and insolent animosity against the enemies of the faith. The sight of a number of Mussulmen at prayer reminds the onlooker very much of a company of soldiers at drill. There is something official and outward in the character of the prayers offered up. This fiery characteristic, once adopted into the Islamite religion, has never departed from it, and is indeed a natural consequence of its conception of God. According to the Mohammedan idea, God does not deliver, He rules. The supreme duty of religion is not to hold fellowship with Him, but to obey Him. The mission of Islamism is not one of instruction, but of conquest. The greatest of all crimes is rebellion against God, or the prophet who speaks in His name. Thus Islam is necessarily an aggressive religion. The Moslem may have exchanged his position of conqueror for that of conquered; he may be submissive in the presence of a superior force, of a superior organisation and instruments of warfare; he may be mute and resigned, as he is mute and resigned before the awful decrees of Fate,—but intolerance is the essence of his religion. The fiery fanaticism born of his creed is still ready at the first opportunity to burst forth into violence, as the lurking wild beast of the desert leaps upon its prey; and as the Mussulman would be true to his faith, loyal to his conceptions of duty, he must be ready to exterminate every one whose creed is alien to his own.

In its treatment of slavery, again, Mohammedanism has inflicted a vast injury on mankind. Even by in some sense ameliorating the condition of the slave—by laying down rules for his treatment—it has recognised this vast injustice, has perpetuated it as the normal condition of Eastern society.

But, above all, in its treatment of woman Mohammedanism has clearly shown the inherent barbarism of its character. Nothing can be more degrading than the position it has assigned to the female sex, and in all lands cursed with its sway, the sweetness, the beauty, and the sanctity of the family tie have utterly disappeared, and the home which in Christian lands has often been the fountain of moral health and purity, even to those who have never acknowledged the sanctions of religion, has been replaced by the odious impurity of the harem. The wife, instead of being recognised as the equal and companion of her husband—weaker, indeed, and leaning on his strength, but by the gracefulness, the sweetness, the sympathy of her nature abundantly returning the obligation and enriching his sterner existence,—instead of enjoying the dignified and responsible position of being the sharer of his joys and sorrows, the confidant of his life, is degraded to be his slave, or is regarded as valuable chiefly as furnishing a stock of fierce and valiant warriors. Again the unlimited liberty of divorce sanctioned by Mohammed destroys the very idea of matrimony as a sacred institution—degrading it into a union of mere passing convenience or a mercantile transaction, in which the interest and wishes of the weaker sex are relentlessly sacrificed to the stronger. Nothing can exceed the unutterable coarseness of the Koran in all that regards the relation of the sexes—

its contemptuous tone in all that concerns woman. But even the ample indulgence it permits has not checked the further development of guilty passion, for in Mohammedan countries unnatural vice is very prevalent.

Islamism has been on the whole a demoralising agency, checking progress, perpetuating abuses, the deadly enemy of enlightenment and civilisation; and even by being in a limited sense an improvement on the preceding state of things, it has prevented the introduction of a better creed and a purer and loftier morality. Even at the present day, the traveller by sea is struck by the vast extent of its sway as he notes the green flag of Islam floating over hosts of pilgrims collected from the farthest Dutch islands of the east to Cape Town on the south. But wherever it has penetrated, it has proved a barrier to the progress of Christianity and of civilisation; it has induced low barbarous tribes to cast away their idols, only to plunge them in a still worse fanaticism. Its solitary service to Humanity is that it has enforced abstinence from strong drink among races not particularly addicted to that indulgence.

Such has the religion of Mohammed been in the past, and such we may reasonably suppose would be its course in the future if the forces of civilisation were not now happily too strong for it. It is, we say again, essentially a persecuting religion, admitting of no compromise with other creeds, further than conscious weakness may suggest—kept in restraint only by the exercise of that force which itself enjoins. Such as it was in its fiery and turbulent youth, it is in the present time of its decay; and if in its after-course it was

modified by the influences of learning and civilisation, if it suggests to us the schools of Bagdad, or the careless grace and elegance of Cordova and Seville, these were but the phosphorescence that lit up for a moment the dark and troubled sea of Barbarism—the passing gleam kindled by the whim or favour of liberal Khan or Kaliph, soon to disappear again in surrounding darkness.

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